

TAINTED YOUTH

(Diary of a Human Target)

Isidora Vey

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Phase One: Distant Innocence

I don't know when I first started feeling like a target; maybe on the day I was born, on 21st June 1963, a Friday with a new moon, after an eight-month gestation and artificial throes. Everybody was taken by surprise because, as it is known, babies born at the end of eight months don't survive.

But maybe not; anyway, my first years were very innocent. My infancy memories fade away in a hazy nirvana, as time seemed flexible and non-linear and space stretched languidly to infinity, since children of that age can hardly tell the difference between dreams and reality.

Back at those times, my parents and I often used to go to the local cinema. I was particularly fond of watching Greek or foreign movies, although I had a small problem: I always got scared when the screen lit up, the moment when the blackness of the dark canvas was dispelled by the blinding light of the projector. For this reason, just before the film started, I stood up on my chair, turned my back on the screen and waited for the movie to begin. In the meantime, those sitting behind me were pretty annoyed: "Turn round and be seated!" I often heard but paid no heed. My parents told me the same but I just couldn't face the screen unless the film had started for good. *What was I really afraid of? What did I fear that would flash before me on the black screen?*

I was about three and a half years old when a doll of mine lost a leg, which made me very upset. I took the toy in

my hand, got out in the yard and threw it away with might and main. The doll flew over the two adjacent building plots and bumped against the wall of aunt Penelope's garden, about thirty metres away. That seemed strange to me and I ran into the house to fetch my mother. I told her what had happened, but she did not at all believe that I had managed to throw the doll so far. "That's impossible! Don't tell lies!" she scolded me and got into the kitchen again.

During those years I was quite innocent and credulous, always ready to trust anybody about anything. I also had no problem giving my toys away to other children, although they usually didn't let me even touch theirs. Pretty soon, they all started calling me "stupid" and I could not understand the reason why.

It was a warm spring morning and I was walking along the street, together with my mother, when two boys of my age, sitting quietly in their garden, called me: "Hey you, come here, we want to give you a present!". My mother attempted to dissuade me but I wouldn't listen.

"So, where is the present?" I asked.

The two boys giggled but said nothing.

Then, a sudden slap on my face gave me quite a jolt.

"This is the present!" one of the kids said and then they both burst into wild laughter. I started crying and got away at once, more bewildered than sad. *This was just a prank, alright, but why don't I ever come up with such tricks? Why can't I ever think of making fun of anybody?* I wondered. I was only four years old then, but I could already sense I was different from the other children.

In the mornings I used to play alone and carefree in the open field next to our house. However, there were two older girls who passed by quite often. As soon as they saw me, they always stopped and sought to scare me, telling me

that they were witches: “We come from Africa and we know all about magic! If you don't sing to us, we shall make you like this!” they hissed and showed me an olive-tree leaf. Fearing that I would be either beaten up or turned into a leaf, I started singing immediately.

One day, when I was four and a half years old, my mother and I paid a visit to Mrs Daphne, who lived nearby. While the two women were chatting in the balcony, I spent my time exploring the garden, the yard, the stairs. I had ended up on the terrace, when I saw a girl of my age playing in the next garden. I smiled to her spontaneously; she looked at me angrily and called me “pig”. I didn't get it at once; I thought I had heard wrong.

“Hi! How are you?” I asked politely.

“You, pig!” she cried again.

I walked away sad and returned to my mother in the balcony. Ten minutes later, the bell rang and the hostess went to answer the door. It was another friend of Mrs Daphne, together with her daughter. I was really taken aback when I recognized one of the two African girls who took pleasure in frightening me. Hardly realizing how it started, we soon had a bad fight; she pushed me down and hit me, shouting in a strident voice: “I am African, I know how to cast spells and I can kill you!”. I burst into crying and I wanted to leave at once.

One night, as I was riffling through my father's medical book, I saw a picture that shocked me more than anything else in my life till then: It was a drawing of a human skeleton. I was scared out of my wits at the thought of some horrible illness that could reduce a man like this! I asked my father immediately and he explained to me that all people are like this inside and this is what remains when they die. Speechless with terror, I ran to my bed at once,

determined to fall asleep at once and forget all about it. However, when I woke up next morning, I realized that a traumatic experience is never forgotten.

On 12th November 1967 my younger sister was born. She was brought home a few days later; I remember, the weather was incredibly cold and the wind was blowing with a vengeance. Some months later, she took her name, Alice.

At first I didn't have any particular problem with her. Nevertheless, as time passed, I could see that our parents and relatives liked her more than me because she was "such a smart girl", "all airs and graces", "a cutie". Moreover, no matter what mischief she was up to, she was always excused because she was "the little one". I, on the contrary, was often thrashed over a trifle and nobody ever excused me for anything. Let alone I almost forgot my name: I was no longer Yvonne. I was "the big one".

My best friend was Gregory, my father's godson, who was two years younger than me and lived in the same neighbourhood. Sometimes I can still hear his shrill voice ringing in my ears: "Let's go out and play!". I also used to play with Urania, the baker's blue-eyed daughter, who was two years older than me. The three of us had great fun together playing in the fields every day, living the most wondrous adventures in our imagination. I reminisce a scene, when I was about five years old and I was leading four other children into a field, all of us holding thin twigs in our tiny hands, as though they were scepters.

In contrast to the other girls, who could hardly wait to grow up, get married and have children, I openly expressed my aversion to the role of housewife and mother. I simply liked running around and exploring the fields instead of helping mum with the housework. I used to avoid dolls; I preferred playing "Indians and Cowboys" with the boys

rather than “mother and children” with the girls. For this reason, the housewives of the neighbourhood disliked me a lot and had no problem in showing it to me. In fact, they foamed with rage anytime they saw me playing in the streets and called me “tomboy”. Especially aunt Pauline, Gregory's mother, kept on trumpeting forth that when she was at my age she could manage the whole housework by herself. As about her mother, a fat old hag always loaded with fancy gold jewels, she literally hated me. She called me names and threatened me to beat me up, whenever she saw me. One day, while Gregory and I were playing quietly in his yard, the old hag rushed out and took him quickly inside the house, shouting to me: “If you don't disappear at once, I will tear you asunder!”

My father was seldom at home because he worked as a captain in the merchant navy. I remember, it was a sunny summer day when he and I paid a visit to a colleague seaman. First, we gathered olives in a green field. Then, we went to the seaman's house, which was a nice traditional cottage with a spacious whitewashed yard. As soon as I entered the bedroom, I saw an old rifle hanging on a wall. I raised Cain to make them give it to me. After a lot of hesitation, the host's black-dressed mother took down the gun and handed it to me. Beaming with happiness, I took it out to the yard and started aiming at stuff. The old woman brought me a chair. “Oh, the girl may faint!” she exclaimed full of concern, but I couldn't understand why I may faint. Because I'm a girl, maybe? Anyway, I found out soon that I couldn't hit anything because the rifle had no bullets. I definitely wanted bullets, I made a song and danced about it, but they refused to do me that favour. In all probability, they didn't have any bullets at all.

Another day I was feeling bored because my friend Gregory was nowhere to see. Namely, I was looking forward to playing with some impressive cowboy pistols he had -a recent gift his aunt Calliope had brought from America. After lunch, I decided to visit him. I entered the house through the back door and found nobody in the kitchen. I slowly walked to Gregory's room, there was no one there either. I peeped through the ajar bedroom door and saw that the whole family was fast asleep inside. Being very careful so as not to make a sound, I searched among Gregory's toys, found the two shiny golden pistols, took them in my hands and went off at a run. As soon as I arrived home, my mother saw my new toys and she started shouting:

"Tell me right now, where did you find these guns?"

"I found them on the road!" I replied quickly, with my most innocent face.

"These pistols are too expensive to be Greek! Start talking, did you steal them from an American boy?"

"No, no, I found them!" I insisted.

A little later, aunt Pauline rolled up; my mother showed her the guns and aunt confirmed that they belonged to Gregory. I awkwardly excused myself that I had taken the toys "by mistake", I said I was sorry and gave them back. "Never mind, but Yvonne left the back door open when she left!" aunt Pauline said calmly.

A few days later, I met Gregory in a big building plot next to his house; we decided to play stone-throwing battle and barricaded ourselves behind two opposite heaps of gravel. All at once, I grabbed a huge flat stone and hurled it at Gregory. Yet, borne along by my own impetus, I didn't aim well; the stone flew really high and landed behind a two-metre wall at the far end of the field. Right then, a pained woman's voice was heard: "Oh, my head!". Gregory

ran quickly and disappeared behind some thick leafage; I didn't find the time to escape, so I just hid behind my heap of gravel. In no time, an old man appeared and yelled at me angrily: "I know you are hiding behind the gravel, show yourself or I'll come and beat you!" I hesitated for a few moments, but I finally exposed myself and was obliged to get a blasting from the old man, for ten long minutes.

It took me many years to realize the oddity of the event: the stone had covered a distance of about 30 metres, at a height of 2.5 metres. Even as an adult, I doubt whether I could throw a stone that far...

Wondrous things used to happen to me back at those years: Sometimes I emptied my mind from all thoughts and spontaneously had a strange feeling that I were hollow inside, as if my body were devoid of inner organs; or I felt like sinking in a dark vortex, only for a split second, before I started up agitated. Some other times, I had the odd impression of being cut off from the world that surrounded me; everything and everyone else seemed to turn up around me in coordination, like a sinister three-dimensional kaleidoscope. Almost every night, when I went to bed and closed my eyes, I had a weird yet delightful experience: I felt like whirling deeper and deeper under a vertiginous night sky; at the zenith of my virtual universe, thousands of colourful stars sparkled like fabulous treasure.

... Too bad that such experiences will become rarer and rarer as years go by, and they will disappear for good with the advent of adolescence.

Class A Junior

My first day at elementary school, in mid September 1969, proved to be a rather disagreeable experience: I had never been with so many children together before, and I felt like a fish out of water. However, the other pupils seemed to have no problem at all. As soon as I realized that I was going to be glued to a desk for hours, away from my friends and my games in the street, I decided to play truant in the very first break. I approached a girl and told her to come home with me. She was worried that a teacher might see us (*so what?*), but I finally persuaded her. “If the bell rings, we are finished!” she kept murmuring all the way home and I couldn't understand why she was so afraid. When we arrived, the girl left at once and I lied to my mother that classes had been dismissed. However, after an hour or so, a boy from the sixth class showed up and took me back to school.

A few days later, when I returned from school, I noticed there was something different about our house: Until the previous day, we had been living at 30 Nereid st., in the north of Glyfada. However, all the numbers in our street had just changed and from then on we would be living at number 13. I knew the superstition about the unlucky number, I felt a little uneasy, but I refused to regard that as a sign of fate.

Anyway, I soon got used to the school routine. I particularly singled out Fotis Armaos, a boy in my class, whom I liked a lot: He was a tall, blond, nice kid and an excellent student. Two or three times I ran to him and hugged him, but he found it strange and tried to avoid me.

Once he shouted at me: "Leave me alone! I'm Captain Kirk! Captain Kirk!" I preferred to keep a distance ever since.

Nevertheless, I am sure that the feeling of being targeted got stronger and stronger ever since I started school. For some strange reason, it was not easy for me to get into groups of children and play with them. In fact, they didn't show any willingness to include me in their games. Once, I spent the whole break watching a group of girls playing skipping-rope. More and more girls joined the game, I kept on asking them to let me play too, but they didn't even deign to answer. Only when I went to the teacher and complained, did they finally let me play -just for a few seconds; then, the bell rang.

The first friend I got at school was Duchess, a very beautiful girl with voluminous black hair falling to her shoulders. I had not at all noticed her worn out clothes and shoes, nor did I care about her complete incapability of learning. Three months had already passed, but she could not write a word, not even the alphabet. All the other children avoided her -and me as well.

One day, another classmate approached and talked to me during the break: it was Louise Hoidas, a short, chubby, curly-haired girl, who suggested I should get rid of Duchess and join her large party. She explained that the other children didn't want to play with me because of Duchess and that if I left her, I would find lots of friends. Soon I became the object of a funny tug-of-war: Louise was pulling my right sleeve and Duchess the left one, until I decided to follow Louise.

Some days later, Louise didn't want my company anymore, although we still sat together, at the same desk. As about Duchess, she was never seen at school again. I didn't manage to find any other friends during the rest of the year,

so I spent most of the breaks wandering alone in the school-yard; and more often than not, I bumped upon those nasty African girls who never lost a chance of making fun of me.

I am not at all sure whether the teacher liked me or not. Once, Louise and I were talking continuously during the lesson; at a moment, we both laughed at a picture of a crab in our reading-book. The teacher was annoyed, she yelled at both of us but whacked my palms four times with her wooden ruler. It hurt a lot, a lot more than I had expected; I burst into tears and didn't stop crying for the rest of the lesson. For the next five days, that painful experience kept coming into my mind again and again, filling me with fear and agony.

Despite the above mishaps, I managed to pass the class with full marks. As I was walking up Hymettus Avenue together with my mother, both feeling happy about my success, a red-haired boy suddenly darted out of a yard, pointed a finger at me and shouted maliciously:

“You, shit!”

“Isn't he a fool, mum!” I said loudly and kept on walking, as if nothing had happened.

Just for a moment it occurred to me that the incident might have been a bad omen for my future, but I dismissed the thought immediately.

* * *

That summer, my grandma Jane, my father's mother, came from Cefallonia and stayed with us for two months, because she wanted to see some doctors in Athens. One day mum grumbled to dad over the wine that grandma drank all the time (for she was too fond of the bottle), and then she went on an errand. When she got back, my father told her

that in the meantime he had asked his mother to leave and return to the island as soon as possible. So, the very next day the old woman packed up and got ready to set off.

“Are you leaving, grandma?” I wondered, as I saw her in our veranda with her luggage in hand.

“Yes, I'm leaving because your dad sends me away!” she replied.

“But why?”

“It seems that he doesn't want me here,” she answered frigidly.

A few days later, my father signed up as a captain on a merchant ship. Soon mum received a letter from him, commanding her to send her mother off too, otherwise he would never return home. My mother obeyed at once. However, grandma Alice didn't have her own house, so she ended up in an old people's home in Athens. A month later, she had a stroke and died. “Because of too much happiness,” said mum bitterly.

On the day of the funeral, the coffin with the dead body inside was left on the big table of the sitting room, according to the custom. The lid of the coffin stood by the front door, as a sign of mourning. From dawn till dusk relatives and neighbours came along to pay their respects to the dead woman. As about me, I showed a paradox frivolity all day, playing with Gregory in the yard and stealing flowers from the wreaths. It is not that I didn't care about grandma Alice; she was a quiet woman, who never bothered anybody. Yet, it was impossible for me to feel sorry for her loss, as if I refused to accept the reality of death.

In general, my mother has always been the model of self-sacrifice, constantly occupying herself with the household chores and the increasing demands of my father and his family: From the very first day of their marriage, my father's

relatives (usually his parents or his six sisters) used to land on our house and stay for months each time, even when my dad travelled abroad because of his job. While they were here, my grandpas demanded to be taken to a different doctor every day; as about my aunts, they came just for fun and tourism. They were all obsessed with Athens, the capital of Greece, maybe because they had all grown up in an isolated mountainous village of Cefallonia.

Note: After the above dramatic event, the long-lasting visits of my father's family became even more frequent.

Class B Junior

Thursday, 12th November 1970

Most pupils still find difficulty in reading and writing, but I'm quite fluent. Starting from this month, I will be keeping a diary; I feel the need, maybe because my problems have begun to accumulate: Day by day, the other children prove to be more cunning than me, with a natural inclination to deception. Since I've never had such qualities, I have already become a sitting duck for many rascals. As I am rather credulous, it is very easy for them to talk me into giving them my toys and stationery. On the other hand, I never think of fooling anyone. I have no gumption, they often say.

During the breaks, I usually stand alone in a corner and watch the others playing around and having fun. The only classmate who talks to me is Dimitri, a neurotic mischief who accosts me because he wants my pens, rubbers, pencils, or toys. As soon as he gets what he wants, he disappears. This morning he told me -probably sincerely: "Yvonne, If anyone annoys you, come and tell me!" I don't intend to, of course.

Tuesday, 24th November 1970

During the first break, Penny and I were walking and talking in the schoolyard, when a party of four children hastened towards us, shouting: "Look, stupid Yvonne is friends with Penny!" They all started hitting me, then they pushed me down and mocked: "Now Penny is coming with us!" Finally, the gang went away, laughing ironically. Penny

let them take her off without saying anything, as if she had not realized what was happening.

Monday, 14th December 1970

I was a little late today at school. When I arrived, the bell had already rung and the pupils were in their classes. As soon as I sat at my desk, I realized something was wrong: There was no lesson; all the children were crying, shouting, bewailing. I was told immediately that two of our classmates, Penny and Helen, were run over by a car on their way to school this morning. They were in hospital now and they were about to die. Yet, what astonished me most, was the fact that I couldn't feel any sorrow.

A little later, we were informed that Helen was out of danger, but Penny was still expected to die any moment: "Penny's left only six minutes of life!" cried the girls around me. I tried hard to shed a tear, but I just couldn't.

"How many minutes?" I only wondered.

"Six! In six minutes Penny will die!" answered Angie, the girl sitting behind me, while a storm of tears and sobs was raging all around.

As about me, still nothing. The imminent death of a schoolmate caused me no emotion at all. I had to really force myself into shedding one or two tears, just for the sake of appearances.

Finally, Penny was saved "at the last moment". It was a great relief for everybody to see her returning from the hospital in a taxi. Most probably, she had never been in danger at all; my classmates were just being hysterical.

Sunday, 27th December 1970

I have recently discovered the reading-book my father had when he was in the sixth class of elementary school. I

enjoy reading its stories but I like especially the poems, which I usually learn by heart. What has impressed me most is a poem about the Labours of Heracles: it has big verses written in puristic Greek, and it takes two and a half pages. I've read it only twice and memorized it already. I take great pleasure in reciting it wherever I go. Some people look at me in wonder. Others, mostly neighbours, get annoyed and make a wry face. For example, aunt Pauline was not at all happy to hear me reciting the poem this afternoon. "Why don't you wash the dishes instead?" she scolded me.

Tuesday, 9th February 1971

Back to school, after having my tonsils removed. Early in the morning, as I was walking unwarily across the yard, I heard fat-Yanni shouting to his skinny friend: "Let's go and beat Yvonne, who is always sick!" They both approached in skipping steps and started hitting me, just like that, without any reason. I put up a sturdy resistance, I even managed to overpower the skinny boy, but I wasn't strong enough to beat the fat one too. So, I had to retreat crying in pain, feeling defeated and humiliated.

Monday, 15th February 1971

Away from school, things are a little better for me: Almost every day, I meet my friend Gregory and other children of the neighbourhood and we play lots of games like hopscotch, hide-and-seek, tag, the statues, the apples. We have a nice time, although Gregory is always playing tricks on me and then he tells the others that I am a fool. As about aunt Pauline, his mother, she always trumpets forth that "Yvonne is silly. When she sees me on the road, she doesn't say "hello" or "how do you do". She is too foolish for that!". By the way, is there a seven-year-old child, who cares

about greeting the adults while playing in the street?

This afternoon, I had a really bad fight with Gregory, because he insisted that one of my toy-cars was his. Our mothers soon got wind of the fuss and they both came out to see what was wrong. The two women had a sparring match and in the end my mum cried: "Everybody tells me that Yvonne is stupid! If only all children were as good pupils as Yvonne is!" These words will be echoing in my ears for decades...

Friday, 5th March 1971

This morning we went on a school trip to Porto Rafti: After I had spent a lot of time vainly trying to join any party of children, I finally ended up alone on a pebbly beach. I stood there and watched the frothy waves for a while, experiencing a rare tranquility. Suddenly, all the others seemed to be far away; there was only me, the dark blue sea and an empty packet of cigarettes pitching on the foamy waves. I was blissfully immersed in the natural environment, when some children approached and giggled obtrusively. One of them pushed me hard and I stumbled clumsily; they all mocked at me and walked away quickly.

Later in the afternoon, when it was time to leave, all the children lined up in threes near the coaches. All at once, I had a strong premonition that the girl standing next to me would fall in the narrow ditch which yawned a few metres ahead. We started walking towards our vehicle, and when we reached the ditch, the girl did fall into it up to her thighs! She burst into crying, and I wondered how she had actually managed to fall into a hole which was not wider than the length of her feet.

Saturday, 27th March 1971

Unfortunately, I am growing into a very sickly child: Either I cough, or I have the flu, or I have childhood diseases (measles, mumps, chicken pox etc), but I always have a cold. However, for some strange reason, my mother never gives me paper tissues when I go to school; she only gives me a small fabric handkerchief. After the second hour, I start wiping my nose with the sleeves of my blue pinafore.

The nasty colds (nose and eyes running non-stop) first appeared when I was four years old and they last from October to April every year. Strangely enough, no medicine can relieve me. Moreover, I have also come out in pimples. My whole face is covered with them and my classmates wonder:

“What on earth are these?”

“Maybe an infection!” some of them suppose.

“Or mosquito bites!” some others say.

Tuesday, 30th March 1971

This afternoon my parents took me to a dermatologist to see my pimples. After a short examination, he diagnosed acne and prescribed an ointment, which will soon prove to do little good. This means that at the age of seven I have a symptom that normally appears during adolescence.

I really don't know what's happening to me. Sometimes I think I am under a black magic spell: I am obliged to go around always with a red runny nose and lots of greasy pimples all over my face. No wonder that my classmates dislike and avoid me...

Friday, 2nd April 1971

Hoping to reduce the frequency of my colds, my parents decided that I should undergo another operation, the

third one in eight months: First I had my tonsils removed, then my appendicitis, today my nasal adenoids.

As soon as we arrived at the hospital this morning, I was surprised to see that it was just a cheap clinic. A little later I found out that the operation would be performed without any anesthesia, which scared me out of my wits! I tried to fall asleep, so as not to be awake during the operation, but I was too stressed to have a wink.

When the time came, I had to wait outside the operating-theater together with twenty other children. They all entered one by one, stayed there for some minutes and then came out quietly. I didn't hear any of them cry or even complain, in or out of the operating-theater. Obviously, I was the only one who was frightened, but I didn't dare show anything.

When my turn came (I was the last one), the doctors made me sit on a white metal chair, where they tied my arms and legs with leather straps. I wanted to show courage, but I just couldn't. Almost immediately, I burst into crying and fought so hard that I eventually managed to free myself. They tied me to the chair again and started picking my nostrils with some kind of lancets. It didn't last more than five minutes, it didn't hurt much, but I kept on screaming and crying until I saw my blood streaming down the white cloth I was wearing. I was shocked, yet I felt relieved because it was over at last.

... At the end of the school year, despite my being an excellent student in all subjects, I didn't manage to be upgraded with full marks because I had been absent for too many days (more than 60), as the teacher explained.

* * *

Friday, 25th June 1971

Returning from her village in Mani a few days ago, Mrs Lemony, our new neighbour, brought us a bottle filled with handmade liquid butter. This morning the bottle was half-empty and we found a small knitting needle inside! My mother mentioned that to Mrs Lemony, who apologized and excused herself by saying that it was done by mistake. Strange mistake, though...

Saturday, 17th July 1971

Mrs Lemony has become a very good friend of ours. Almost every day she comes and keeps us company. Even when mum is not at home, she comes and talks with my father for hours. Ten days ago she brought us a strange, ugly flower. She told us that it is sacred and considered to be “the flower of Virgin Mary”. It must be kept in a basin of water, where it grows continually. “But don't you ever throw it away, or Virgin Mary will be angry,” said Mrs Lemony.

However, this morning my mother decided to get rid of the so-called “flower of Virgin Mary”, because it is very ugly and gets bigger and bigger every day. The water basin is already too small for it. Moreover, as we have recently learned, it is not at all sacred; it is just a fungus of dubious origin.

Sunday, 8th August 1971

Just like last year, I am spending the summer in Lixouri, on the island of Cefallonia, where my father's kin live. Surprisingly, all my problems disappear miraculously when I am here. Nobody makes fun of me or calls me “stupid” here. Every day we go for a swim at nearby beaches with aunt Domna and her two daughters, Jenny and Niki. We spend the rest of the day playing in the earthen

streets. I get along very well with Jenny, who is two years older than me. I wouldn't say the same about Niki, who is a year younger: Sometimes she gets angry about the merest trifle and she is in the sulks for the whole day.

This afternoon we were hunting butterflies. While playing, I accidentally ruined the wings of one by mistake. "That was a queen butterfly, and God will send you to hell for that! You hear? You will go to hell for that!" exclaimed Niki grimly. I don't know why, but that sentence struck me really bad...

Class C Junior

Monday, 8th November 1971

I am in the third class now. My only friend at school is Tonia, a quiet, obese girl, who is repeating the same class for the third time. During the breaks we usually play jacks.

Unfortunately, this year I happen to be sitting at the same desk with Lisa: she is a stocky, cunning girl, who does nothing but make fun of me all the time. "If you don't give me your pen, I will tell the teacher that you talk smut!" she threatened me this morning. I didn't respond immediately, so she put on an air of anger and raised her hand ostentatiously. I had no choice but do her the favour immediately before she told the teacher, who usually believes Lisa's lies and whacks me with the ruler.

Wednesday, 17th November 1971

This morning we went on a school treat to the nearby mountain. I was playing quietly by myself, since Tonia was absent today, when I was suddenly surrounded by a gang of children. Shouting and giggling mockingly, they destroyed the little house I had just built with stones, and then they went away laughing. A little later, as I was wandering aimlessly among the pine trees, I found a small wallet on the ground. I was naive enough to show it to a boy. He took it from me by deceit, telling me that it was he who had lost it. And I believed him.

A little later I saw Anastasia, a corpulent girl from my class, coming towards me weeping. She was accompanied by a rabble of vociferating children. Full of wrath and

threats, they accused me of having stolen that wallet from her! Then they grabbed me all together and dragged me to the teachers, as if I were a criminal. I was crying all the way, telling them that I had found the wallet and given it to a boy, because he had said it was his. Nobody listened. Before even realizing it, I was standing before the teachers, who immediately scolded me “Where did you soil your your hands like that?”, while the bawls of the rabble were ringing unintelligible in my ears. Anyway, due to lack of evidence, I was finally acquitted by the “court”, although Anastasia and her friends still insisted that I was a thief.

Friday, 19th November 1971

As soon as we entered the classroom and sat at our desks, Anastasia came to me and apologized because, as she had discovered in retrospect, she had forgotten her wallet in her schoolbag. “Well, never mind” I told her. Anyway, I don't think that Anastasia herself had thought of blaming me. In all probability, it was somebody else's idea to accuse me of stealing, because they wanted to cause me a problem.

When I returned home, my mother informed me that she had had a bad quarrel with Mrs Lemony this morning. In fact, mum accused our neighbour that she has been flirting my father for months now and this was confirmed by an anonymous phone call last night. “If only it were true!” said Mrs Lemony to defend herself. In any case, I believe that this woman is jealous of us because my father is a captain while her husband is only a fisherman.

Starting from tomorrow, and for many years to go, we will often find broken eggshells dyed dark purple, right outside our front door...

Monday, 22nd November 1971

This morning the teacher announced something peculiar: “A number of cholera cases have recently been identified in northern Greece; therefore, all Greek children must be vaccinated against this disease! And the vaccination will take place here, at school, tomorrow morning!”. Once I heard it, I spontaneously had some queries: Why, indeed, is it necessary for all Greek children to get into this trouble, just because of a few cholera cases? Besides, as far as I know, cholera is curable nowadays, isn't it?

However, I have a bigger problem than that: Ever since I was a small girl, I have always been terrified of injections and needles. Whenever my mother takes me to the doctor for a blood test, I cry my eyes out, I make a din and it takes four nurses to hold me and get the job done. In this case, however, acting like that is out of the question.

Tuesday, 23rd November 1971

When the time came, all pupils lined up in threes in the school yard, each one waiting for their name to be heard and go into the teachers' office. Normally I would have already started crying, but this time I had no other alternative but keep my temper at all costs. Woe is me if I dare scream or cry in front of everyone: Right from the next moment, I would become the laughing-stock of the whole school.

However, what impressed me most was the fact that none of the other children looked scared. As I was waiting for my turn, full of anxiety, I kept observing all faces again and again, expecting to detect a sign of fear in anybody's eyes. Nothing. All the pupils looked carefree, as if nothing was going on. Only when short Lucy entered the teachers' office and got injected, I heard a classmate shouting: “Look!

Lucy is trembling!”). Many children laughed. The girl was obviously trembling of fear but she didn't dare make a sound.

When my turn came, I clenched my teeth and kept my temper perfectly. So, nobody got wind of my being afraid. Fortunately, the needle was very thin and didn't hurt at all. Moreover, I was surprised to see that there were hundreds of ejections, one for each child -an unprecedented luxury in those years.

Tuesday, 30th November 1971

This afternoon I had a strange accident: I was studying in my room, when suddenly I heard a voice calling me from the yard. I thought it was Gregory, so I stood up and got out of the house at once, leaving the door of the kitchen open. The weather was cold and the wind was blowing hard. As I was passing by the shut window pane of my room, it suddenly broke into a thousand pieces and some of them were hurled against me. A sharp glass blade hurt the side of my right leg, opening a deep wound, while smaller pieces scratched my calf. It took us a long time to stop the bleeding. In all likelihood, it will leave a scar. Anyway, no serious damage was done; I suppose this could have gone a lot worse...

Monday, 6th December 1971

On the way to school this morning I met Martha, a blond girl who comes from Sweden. She is in the fourth class and happens to be a real ignoramus, since the highest of her marks is 6. We were talking calmly, when she suddenly spat out: “Yesterday I met Urania and she told me that she doesn't want to play again with you and your sister, because you are both stupid!”).

I was taken aback because Urania had come to my house on Saturday afternoon, we had played for many hours and we had had a nice time. So, where was the problem?

Yet, that was not all: As we were walking past the church of St Tryfon, which is opposite our school, Martha glared at me and said:

“You are not a Christian!”

“Why do you say that?” I wondered.

“Because you don't make the sign of the cross!” she roared and crossed herself in an ostentatious manner, to show that she was a Christian. I felt obliged to do the same.

Tuesday, 18th January 1972

It's hard to say why but, for a few months now, whenever it rains I'm seized with fright! That's because I fear that the slightest rain might end up in a cataclysm! Perhaps I have been overly influenced by religion. If the rain lasts more than an hour, I start crying wherever I am.

It has been drizzling all day today. Yet, as I was returning from school early in the afternoon, the drizzle became a downpour. I really tried to contain myself but it proved to be impossible for me. Finally, I started weeping in the middle of the road. The other pupils wondered and I had to explain:

“I don't like the rain! What if it becomes a cataclysm?”

“You don't need to be afraid Yvonne, because the rainbow always comes out after the rain. This is God's promise that there will never be another cataclysm. Don't you know that?”, Tonia reassured me and I felt better immediately.

From that moment my phobia started to fade away, until it disappeared completely after two or three days.

Saturday, 29th January 1972

I have another problem too, which first appeared about a month ago: I have a strange feeling that my parents don't love me and that they intend to kill me! "I was told to slaughter her in the backyard!" I heard my mother confess to a neighbour the other day, and I was scared stiff. A couple of days later, I was really relieved to learn that she meant one of our hens, which had cackled like a cock -a bad omen. "You will die!" dad told me this afternoon because I didn't want to eat my dinner. That spoilt my appetite completely.

Fortunately, this obsession will not last longer than a few more days.

Saturday, 18th March 1972

This evening aunt Wilma and her mother paid us an unexpected visit. The strange thing is that they came from Piraeus without uncle William, who is her husband and my mother's cousin. Then, something even more peculiar happened: While mum was in the kitchen making coffee, the two women grabbed a large decorative doll we had on the couch and pulled it apart! They took the head, the legs and the arms off and then they threw all the pieces out in the rubbish bin, on the grounds that the doll was too old! While this was happening, the two women were bantering and screaming like frenzied. I was just looking at them puzzled and did nothing to stop them.

Friday, 21st April 1972

It's been exactly one month since the day my youngest sister, Jasmine, was born. Everybody says she is a very beautiful baby -like all spastics are. Due to the indifference of the staff in the maternity hospital, my mother was left all alone in a room for several hours. In the meanwhile, the

umbilical cord broke and hang out of my mother's body for more than an hour, but nobody got wind of it. As a result, the baby was left without oxygen and eventually she was born with quadriplegia: Her whole body is paralyzed and she suffers from mental retardation too. Since she was thought to die soon, she was hastily baptized in the maternity ward. Her godmother is a Mrs Melina, who will never put in an appearance again.

When my dad first went to the maternity hospital, he came back very angry and said that the baby had a strange sag on her head, which means that it had been bumped! He wanted to sue the doctors, but everybody dissuaded him from doing so because “there is no way you can get to the bottom of this, there is no proof; let alone that doctors always back up each other, no matter what!”

Sunday, 16th July 1972

My cousin Annita has come from Cefallonia and she will stay with us for a couple of weeks. We usually get along well, but she keeps saying that I am in great danger of being killed by the police!

One day last summer, when I was in Lixouri, I dug a hole in her garden with my toy spade. According to her, lots of water came out of the hole and flooded the whole island, and ever since the local police have been looking for me, with the intention of killing me! “If they find you, they'll shoot you to death!” she says with a grim face.

I am a little scared, because I can't rule out the possibility of her telling the truth...

Class D Junior

Sunday, 10th September 1972

This afternoon Alice quarreled with an older girl in the playground. "I will tell my big sister!", she moaned and pointed at me. I was on a swing, when I suddenly saw that girl standing beside me, waving her hand before me threateningly, as if she were about to hit me. "Who do you think your sister is? If I give her a slap, she will fall to pieces!" she yelled at Alice. My first reaction was to blink in surprise; then I decided to stand up for myself, so as not to be called "stupid" or "coward". There followed a battle royal, then the other girl ran to fetch her older brothers and I fetched my mother. I didn't really understand how, but we finally made it up.

Tuesday, 7th November 1972

Well, the above bully was meant to become my best friend during this school year. We happen to be classmates, her name is Barbara and she is already well known at school as a liar and a thief. Constantly trumpeting forth that her family is destitute, she has already fooled many children into giving her various things: stationery, clothes, shoes, toys, even jewellery. According to what they say, if she is not given anything, she steals it with dexterity. Everybody warns me about her but I don't pay much heed, maybe because I need her friendship; apart from boring Tonia, Barbara is the only child at school who is willing to keep me company. Besides, we do have fun together...

Wednesday, 15th November 1972

During the first months of her life, Jasmine didn't look any different from a normal baby, so I was not particularly concerned about her. Besides, I like to believe that when she grows up, she may overcome her problem. In fact, until recently Jasmine's health showed a steady improvement: She had already started to lift her head, she was also about to sit like a normal baby. The doctors who saw her were very pleased. However, about a month ago, she ran a temperature of 41.5° Celcius that wouldn't go down. The doctors diagnosed brain fever, which lasted for days and broke her once for all: She will never lift her head again, she will never sit; from now on, she will always be lying in bed.

As about my mother, she is not only devastated but she often receives malicious comments as well:

“It seems you have many sins, that's why God gave you this child; he wanted to punish you,” aunt Domna told her the other day.

“Is this your daughter's baby?” she is often asked by other women, whenever we go to the playground.

“If I had such a child, I would kill it!” said aunt Penelope, my sister's godmother, when she visited us yesterday afternoon.

... As time passes, Jasmine's disability will become more and more obvious, while hope will be waning day by day. Soon we'll start taking her to a center for spastic children, where she will have kinesitherapy; in my opinion, this doesn't bring much result. But I always love my little sister, I take her in my lap, sing her songs and hope that some day she will get well, perhaps by a miracle.

Wednesday, 6th December 1972

Growing up, I feel it is not right to shun others and

always retire into my shell. So, I often push myself into groups of children, even if their behaviour sometimes confuses me: When I avoid them, they call me silly; when I approach them, they make fun of me. I do my best to be friendly and pleasant, I often ignore teasings or I respond with a smile of understanding. I even do them occasional favours so as to become more likeable. Yet, I can see that this strategy brings poor results. Furthermore, I must admit that I am still very timid and I don't dare oppose anyone -maybe because I'm always alone against gangs of bullies. "Yvonne is stupid, she doesn't understand what she is told!" says Nora, the star of the class, again and again.

Unfortunately, this year I happen to be sitting at the same desk with Anna Harris, a corpulent girl who takes pleasure in terrifying me, using her large size and the high number of her friends. She always tries to be clever, she steals my things and derides me all the time, just to show how smart she is.

Yesterday I agreed to exchange my rubber jumping rope for her fancy pen. Today, during the first break, Anna suddenly appeared before me together with the horde of her lumpish friends. In her hands she was holding the rubber rope, which had now been reduced to a dirty rag full of knots. I really wondered, how she had achieved that so quickly!

"I want my pen back, Yvonne! And here is your jumping rope!" she said and stretched it before me in an ostentatious manner. "This is your rope, Yvonne!" she repeated pompously.

I tried to protest but I shut up quickly when I faced the angry looks of the horde. So, I returned the pen and got back the useless rope.

"You see how dumb she is? She always does what she is

told!” I heard Anna saying mockingly, as she and her underlings were moving off. I just stood behind alone, feeling sad and humiliated -as usual.

Friday, 12th January 1973

Since the beginning of the school year I have been collecting cards that depict various characters from animated cartoons. I find them in certain chocolates, I'm very fond of them and I have almost completed the entire collection.

However, there is a problem: Alice always wants half of whatever I have. She has often asked me to give her half of my cards too. This afternoon she groused and groused, so I decided to give her the cards I have in double. They are quite a few, but obviously not enough for her. She demanded to have exactly half of my basic collection and she wanted to choose which ones! I refused, we had a row, Alice turned on the waterworks (as usual) and mum came immediately to see what was wrong: “Give half of your cards to the infant, you big one!” she shouted angrily. I disagreed, Alice kept on wailing like a siren, and mum found it right to tear as many of my cards as possible, totally deaf to my entreaties and blind to my tears. Finally, something broke inside me and I tore myself all the remaining cards...

Tuesday, 20th February 1973

Early in the afternoon, at about 4:00 o'clock, I happened to meet Anna Harris on the road. She was going to the baker's to buy a loaf of bread. We walked there together, but we found the shop closed, since it was due to open at 5:30 again, like every day. “And this means that I must return home empty-handed? No way!” she growled.

Without hesitating at all, Anna made for the baker's house, which is right behind the shop, and rang the bell

many times until the whole family got out of bed and answered the door. To my surprise, not only were they all smiles to her, but they also opened the shop before its time for the countess to buy half a kilo of bread.

Friday, 9th March 1973

As soon as I got into the classroom this morning, I noticed a big bunch of flowers lying on the first desk. Almost immediately I was informed that one of our classmates had been killed in a car accident two days before. “Who is it?” I asked to know.

“Fotis Armaos!” answered Mary, who sits in front of me.

I was staggered at the terrible news. Fotis had been absent from school for two days, and we all had assumed he were ill. And he had always been my first love, ever since we were in the first grade.

We didn't have a lesson today. All the pupils of my class lined up in threes and we walked to Fotis' house, where we saw his black-dressed mother crying and sobbing, just before the funeral started. We followed the hearse to the local cemetery and we attended the burial rites. I was feeling a deep sorrow, like something sinking inside me. In all, I don't think it was a good thing that the class attended the funeral. In my opinion, this was not good, either for the children or for the dead boy's parents.

Tuesday, 13th March 1973

Almost every day Barbara coerces me into giving her various objects, such as pencil cases, drawing colours, pens, rubbers etc, taking advantage of my fad about the cards of animated cartoons. She has promised many times to provide me with rare cards that I don't have, or numbers over 150, which only she has and no one else. “I have just lost the

cards, but I'm sure they are somewhere in my house. As soon as I find them, I will give them to you! Tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow!" she always says. Deep inside I know she is lying, but I need to believe her. Anyway, I can't be angry at her, because her family is very poor indeed.

This afternoon, while we were going to the grocer's together, she showed me her mother's purse with two drachmas in. "You see? This is all the money we've got!" she told me sadly.

Friday, 16th March 1973

Barbara's demands are increasing day by day. I can hardly anticipate her wishes. No longer contented with school supplies, she keeps asking for more and more of my clothes: blouses, skirts, jackets, shoes, gloves, hats, even embroideries!

This afternoon my mother lost her patience completely, as soon as she saw that my beautiful new shoes were gone. And not only that:

"My gold medallion has also disappeared from the drawer, where it was locked! She stole it!" shouted mum, fume and fret at me.

"Barbara never takes anything unless I give it to her!" I protested.

However, my mother was adamant: "Listen well! If I ever see her in our house again, I will kick her out and I will beat you black and blue! Got it?"

So, I have to make up my mind and start keeping Barbara at a distance. Anyway, she will soon make herself scarce, as soon as she realizes that she isn't going to get anything else from me.

Sunday, 30th April 1973

Gregory and I were playing quietly in his yard this evening, when Martha and a friend of hers passed by. It was Gregory's idea to start teasing them; soon we started calling each other names. All of a sudden, aunt Pauline rushed out of the house, complained about the fuss and took her son inside, slamming the door in my face. This means that I was left all alone in the yard, against the two Swedish cows, both older and bigger than me. "You are a nitwit! Why were you laughing?" roared Martha, with her arms akimbo. I sought to blame Gregory, he had started it anyway, but Martha wasn't listening to a word I was saying. She just pushed me down violently and shouted: "Get out of here now, you idiot!". Then, the two lumps got away laughing. I ran home at once and didn't stop crying until late at night.

Wednesday, 3rd May 1973

Once again, mother demanded that, right after lunch, I should eat two slices of bread, spread with butter and sugar. That's because, according to her, I never eat enough. After many quarrels about this, I have finally figured out what the right thing to do is: I don't argue with her anymore; instead, I take the two fatty slices of bread eagerly, then I go out to the yard and throw them into the adjacent building plot. Mother suspects nothing and we are all happy.

Food has always been a settled stress for me: Since my early childhood, I have always refused to eat my meals, usually saying "I don't want any more" after the first spoonful. As a result, I often got spanked. One day, when I was four, I got so much spanking that I cried myself to sleep; mum was worried and vowed never to beat me up again -because of food.

As long as I can remember, mum has always been

stuck in the kitchen, incessantly cooking and cramming our mouths with food, for fear of our being undernourished. I reckon that just like most of her peer women, my mother suffers from the “postwar syndrome” (my term!), that is constant fear that the German Occupation might return any minute. Whenever I refuse to eat some disgusting dish, macaroni with chopped cuttlefish for instance, she frowns at me and says: “Eat up your food! Thin people don't survive an Occupation! What will you do if the Germans come again?”.

In general, mum is convinced that if someone wants to be healthy and happy, they should eat lots of meat, lots of fat, lots of oil, lots of butter, lots of bread, lots of pasta, lots of milk, lots of everything, all the time.

Wednesday, 12th September 1973

This summer proved to be the happiest of my life. I spent three wonderful months playing on the road with old friends such as Gregory, Urania, Tassos and others. From time to time a friendly neighbour, who used to work for a travel agency, invited all the children to get on his coach and took us to the Diamond Beach, in Glyfada.

Every day there were about fifteen children in my neighbourhood, especially outside my house, playing football, volleyball, rackets, the soldiers, hopscotch, hide-and-seek, tag, the apples, etc.

We all stayed out till midnight, and during all those hours the whole place reverberated with cheerful voices, songs from radios, or thumps from balls and rackets.

I do enjoy our street being full of life; nevertheless, I find it a little strange that in the rest of the city you will seldom see even one child playing out on the road. As if there were no kids in other neighbourhoods...

Class E Junior

Wednesday, 14th November 1973

I'm in the fifth class now, I am growing older and taller and my problems grow bigger too. And the worst of all: Two months ago I had my first period! I am only ten years old, I still feel like a child, my body is absolutely childlike, yet I menstruate!

I still play on the road and go to the playground, but the persistent admonitions of the adults spoil all the fun: "You must not go to the playground ever again, you are a woman now!" ... "Don't run like this, you are a lady now!" ... "You are so tall, you must be over eighteen, and you still play with the little ones?" someone told me this afternoon, while I was on a swing.

Tuesday, 20th November 1973

This morning we went on a school treat to the mountain. When I got bored of wandering alone, I asked to play "the apples" with a group of many children. They didn't refuse at once, however it soon became clear that there was a player too many. Somebody had to leave the game, but who?

"Yvonne!" they all shouted in unison, pointing at me aggressively.

Only Christina raised a mild objection: "Not Yvonne, why?..." but she shut up quickly, as she saw that the others were glaring at her.

Fortunately, right at that moment another pupil came and joined us, so I wasn't obliged to leave -although the

team that had to include me was not very happy about it. Anyway, I must admit I'm not so good at this game, since I am a little sluggish. The rival team always leaves me last for the ten final rounds; I rarely manage to finish them without being hit with the ball.

Friday, 18th January, 1974

This year our teacher is Mr Kakoyannis, a podgy obnoxious man who doesn't seem to like me at all. He always scolds me or whacks me with the ruler, usually for no reason. This morning, during the history lesson, I unconsciously started playing with a piece of paper, making a characteristic sound that could be heard all around. Suddenly, the teacher's eyes almost popped out in anger and he roared: "Who is doing this? I will put it her mouth!" All the children burst out laughing. I was embarrassed and stopped at once, but I didn't avoid being thwacked with the ruler.

Saturday, 23rd February 1974

I hate physical education. It's the most thankless and boring lesson. This time, the teacher made us do a very stupid exercise: We sat down, fixed our hands back on the ground and stretched out the whole body, while the head should be falling back. "Throw your head back! Back I said!" Mr Kakoyannis screamed, but I had no idea he meant me, although I was the only pupil who hadn't thrown the head back. "Just look at her, isn't she like a viper!" he roared and ran towards me furious.

Before I could react anyhow, he grabbed my head in his two hands and pushed it violently down, with all his strength. I heard a terrible "crack" and my neck ached incredibly. I started crying immediately, for fear I had just

broken something, and I didn't dare move.

While this was happening, my mother happened to be in the schoolyard. She had come to ask the teacher about me, and she was waiting for the gymnastics lesson to finish. She saw everything but didn't react at all...

Tuesday, 12th March 1974

As we have recently been informed by the teacher, a Pan-European painting contest has been organized for children of the fifth and sixth grade and I decided to participate. It took me three afternoons to paint my picture on cardboard and today is the day I must submit it.

I feel satisfied about my work: I have painted a girl and a boy playing volleyball in a country field. I have left the vast sky uncoloured but I think my painting is not at all bad for an eleven-year-old child. However, when I arrived at school this morning, my enthusiasm began to wane as soon as I found out something peculiar: Many children, about whom I didn't even know they can paint, had brought amazing paintings made with great detail and wonderful colour combinations -as if they were professional painters!

When we entered the classroom, the teacher called us one by one and asked to see our works of art before giving his approval for participation in the contest. As soon as I showed him mine, he frowned and shouted: "It's half-coloured! Take it back!". I ran to my desk at once and spent the rest of the hour colouring the vast sky in a frenzy. The blue pencil marks looked rather sloppy on the smooth cardboard.

Once the bell rang for the first break, Marina (the prodigy of the class, she paints very well too), gathered all the paintings except mine and set out for the teachers' office. If she arrived there before me, it would be too late: The

teacher had said that all paintings should be submitted in class; he wasn't going to accept any others in his office. Working frantically, I finished my work and rushed to the stairs looking for Marina. I had to climb down a torrent of children and fight with some of them in order to reach her in time, but I finally made it.

Strange, however: I was the only one in the whole school who had to struggle so hard in order to take part in the contest. All the other paintings were accepted without any problem, although some of them didn't meet the requirements: We were allowed to use only pencil colours on cardboard, but many participants had used water colours, temperas, oil colours on canvas, and who knows what else. Yet, none of these works was rejected as inappropriate. On the contrary, one of them even got a prize: it was an oil painting of a girl by a waterfall, fine but not anything amazing...

Saturday, 23rd March 1974

Some of my classmates, like Nora, Anna, Mary and others, are almost fully developed women. They already have the right curves and they also flirt boys, which makes them even more popular and puts them higher in the class hierarchy. I, on the other hand, keep growing taller and thinner: I am 1.62 m tall now but no heavier than 40 kilos. Moreover, everybody agrees that I am very ungraceful.

As a result, there is a general outcry against me: "You look like a telegraph post!" ... "You are as thin as a rake!" ... "You look like a skeleton!" ... "You walk too fast and you jump up and down, like a stork!" ... "You can't talk, you gibber!" ... "The giraffe is coming! Come and see the giraffe!"

"Hey, you, do you still go to elementary school?" an

unknown woman asked me, as I was going to school this morning.

“No, I go to the kindergarten”, I answered.

Thursday, 4th April 1974

Almost every afternoon I meet my old friends in the street, but this year my best friend is Angie. She is a new neighbour, with whom I get along very well. We have great fun together, when we play hopscotch or rackets, for hours every day.

Today, however, Angie and the others were nowhere to find, so I agreed to play dice with two neighbours and classmates of mine: Theodore and Alex (cunning foxes, both). The prize for the winner would be twenty old comics. I felt really surprised when, after a lot of playing time, fortune seemed to be smiling at me. Little by little, I finally won all the magazines -to the boys' great disappointment.

Friday, 5th April 1974

This evening, Theodore and Alex appeared in my yard unexpectedly and they suggested we should dice those comics again. I wondered about their further relish for dice but I said yes, taking into account my good luck of yesterday.

What a strange thing, though: Right from the beginning, it was impossible for me to win anything -in contrast to the other two, who kept throwing double sixes exclusively! As time passed, I kept losing more and more magazines. I hoped in a positive twist of fate but in vain: Before even realizing it, I had lost all my comics!

I am really bewildered, since I don't know how to explain that mystery: I managed to beat them yesterday, but certainly not with double sixes exclusively! So, what went

wrong this time? Had they done something to the dice maybe? Were they using a magnet or what? But how? I can't say I noticed anything suspicious during the game...

Wednesday, 24th April 1974

A new nightmare has come in my life: It is a very ugly boy of my age, with an unnaturally red face, who seems to dislike me a lot. His family has recently moved to an outhouse, only three building blocks away from from my neighbourhood.

This afternoon, while I was going to the baker's, he and that cow of his sister happened to see me. They were in their backyard, pretty far from me, yet they began pointing at me, screaming hysterically: "Aaaaah! Look how she walks! Hey, you camel! Ha ha haaaa!" The cow started walking with huge steps, in a caricature manner, and both siblings kept laughing at me. I just walked away hastily.

Tuesday, 28th May 1974

Unfortunately, the above psychopath has eventually learned my name. So, whenever I see him or any of his friends, they start screaming my name sarcastically, right in the middle of the road -just like they did early this morning, while I was going to school: "Yvonne! You giraaaaafe! You cameeeel! I'm talking to you, bloody loseeeer!". I hastened my steps and disappeared from their sight.

In the evening I met Urania and went for a walk together. Suddenly, I heard a nasty crowing voice yelling my name again and again derisively. No doubt, it was him again. I pretended I heard nothing but Urania paused right there, turned round and shouted to him stern:

"What's wrong, Vlassis? Why are you screaming?"

"I'm just calling a name!" he answered mockingly.

“Stop calling this name!” she ordered him and then we walked away quietly.

I was impressed that Vlassis shut up immediately and that my friend knew his name.

“You never talk back, they make fun of you and you never say anything, that's why such things happen to you!” Urania admonished me. Of course, she has never faced similar problems.

* * *

Tuesday, 2nd July 1974

Jasmine is growing up, she is already two years old but she can neither sit nor lift her head. She looks like a four-month-old baby. The only thing she does, is smile sweetly when we talk to her. She is still very beautiful.

This morning we paid a visit to my mother's relatives in Piraeus. My cousin Diamanta, who is a year older than me, thinks she is a lady now and she doesn't fancy playing any more. In fact, she barely talks to me. As a result, I feel very bored whenever we visit her family.

At a moment, I took Jasmine and went upstairs, to the attic. I found Billy there, who is Diamanta's nine-year-old brother and a regular jack-in-the-box. He never stops screaming and jumping around, often giving the impression that he can't control his movements. He never rests, not even in his sleep; almost every night he falls off his bed.

After I had made myself comfortable in an armchair, with the disabled child in my lap, cousin Billy grabbed a big cushion and threw it at Jasmine. The baby laughed nonsensically, and Billy repeated the offense again and again. Jasmine kept on laughing, actually having fun. I, as usual, thought I should show humour and adaptability, by taking

the whole thing as a joke. Before long, Billy started throwing the cushion more and more violently, until Jasmine burst into crying. Billy was laughing foolishly and kept on attacking the infant, who was crying frightened. Finally, I realized that the “joke” wasn't going to end soon, so I got up and left, with Jasmine in my arms, while Billy was wondering why.

Saturday, 6th July 1974

Almost every afternoon I go to the playground, where I have fun on the swings for hours. Anyway, I don't go there only for that. I have singled out a very handsome boy of my age, whose name is Chris. He is thin and lissom, with a clear white skin and black curly hair. As soon as he arrives with his friends, I run and sit on the next swing. I never have enough of watching and admiring him, as he rises very high and then jumps down, surprising everybody with his agility and boldness. He never pays any attention to me, sometimes I even have the impression that he laughs at me. I don't care, though; just seeing him every day at the swings, is enough to make me happy.

Sunday, 21st July 1974

We have been on vacation to Cefallonia for a week now. This morning I became a godmother to Jenny and Niki's little brother, who is only five months old. The sacrament took place in the church of St Gerasimos. I named the boy Vincenzo.

Initially, aunt Domna had wanted my mother to be a godmother to the baby, but mum refused because she would like to have a goddaughter rather than a godson. So, it was decided that I was the one who should do this job.

Anyway, I think it was a strange christening: Apart from my cousin Annita, there were no other guests present, although we have many relatives in Lixouri and the nearby villages. There was not even a photographer -which is quite odd, taking into account that this was the baptism of the long-desired male successor to the Fezarris family.

Class F Junior

Tuesday, 26th November 1974

Being in the sixth class now, I think it's time I got rid of my bad reputation. In general, I try to control myself, so as not to occasion being mocked by the others. I also try to contain my nervousness and I refrain from talking much; I prefer to keep my mouth shut. However, this technique doesn't seem to bring significant results: Sometimes, when I am with other children, I crack bad jokes and the others make fun of me. It is just too difficult for me to always contain myself; as if there were a sinister force inside me, urging me to say what I shouldn't.

Coming home from the English tutorial school this evening, something odd happened: While I was walking under a bright street lamp, I saw the enlarged shadow of a man, which rose about 3,5 metres high. The man seemed to be wearing a coat and a hat. I found it odd because the shadow wasn't formed on the road or on a wall, but it was standing tall before me! I stopped walking and tried to discern who was really there, making such a big shadow, but I saw nobody. Apart from me, there was no one else on the road. When I got home and told my mother about it, she said it were nothing and that I should forget the whole thing; then, she started crossing me, praying "Jesus Christ wins and dispels all evil".

Monday, 10th February 1975

Is something changing in my life? The truth is that I've been feeling a lot better about myself lately; I have

become more sociable, I have gained some self-confidence, I even dare talk back when somebody makes fun of me. Not that I have a choice: When I try to ignore them, they fight me even worse.

This afternoon, as we were returning from a school treat, suddenly two girls started teasing me:

“You walk too slowly, go back!” exclaimed Mary, who was walking next to me, and pushed me to the back line.

“No, stay where you are!” shouted Nora from behind, and pushed me to the front line.

“No, go back!” Mary pushed me again.

“Stay in front, I said!” cried out Nora and pushed me too.

For a few seconds I let them push me around passively, while some other children were giggling. All at once, as if I had just woken from torpor, I made so bold as to yell at them: “Leave me alone, both of you!”. Mary sought to say something but I anticipated her: “If you want to run on a marathon, here, the road is empty! Get out of the line and run as much as you like!”. Both smart alecks shut up.

Friday, 21st February 1975

Strangely enough, my position in class has risen lately. I am no longer everybody's beck and call. First of all, I have become a very good pupil: I excel in all subjects and our teacher, Mr Panos, likes me a lot. Even my classmates often show their admiration for my overall knowledge.

This morning, the teacher asked the whole class: “Does anyone of you know the names of the three American astronauts who first stepped on the moon?”

Only I raised my hand, gave the right answer and left everybody speechless.

“But, sir, is it possible that she knows everything?” some children wondered.

Saturday, 19th April 1975

It's happening more and more often, and I have been thinking about it: Every time she sees me, aunt Penelope sends me on errands. This happens almost every day, sometimes more than once in a day.

This afternoon she told me to go and buy her a water melon, which proved to be too heavy for me and my hands ached a lot. It really gets on my nerves when I have to interrupt my games and do her favours, but I just can't refuse.

In the evening my godmother paid us a visit and brought presents and Easter candles for me and my sister. Weird, though: Just before unwrapping the candles, my godmother's seven-year-old daughter exclaimed: "Watch out! One of them is broken!" Indeed, as soon as we took the candles out of their cardboard cases, we saw that one of them, in fact mine, was broken in two pieces. I wondered how the kid had known that, although I had expected it: Every year, the Easter candle my godmother brings for me happens to be broken; maybe because of the long car journey from Piraeus to our house...

Monday, 12th May 1975

This afternoon, aunt Penelope came to our house steaming with anger. Obviously, she had some grievances against us.

"You are making us curse!" she snorted wrathful. "You have filled the two plots between us with building materials and Orpheus, my son, goes there all the time and he gets black with dirt! I demand that you do something about it as soon as possible!"

"But what can we do?" asked my mother passively.

“Fence the plots! Fence them both with wire! Otherwise, I don't know what happens!”

I wondered at Penelope's demand, as well as at my mother's promise to fence a stranger's land. For the last two years we have been building two more storeys over our house. Thus, we put the building materials in the adjacent empty plots. Where else could we put them? On the road? Besides, Penelope's son, the two-year-old Orpheus, is nothing but a handful. Neither his mother nor his father can handle him, and he usually goes around stark naked. That's why the children of the neighbourhood have nicknamed him “Adam”.

Monday, 23rd June 1975

To my great disappointment, neither this year was I meant to be upgraded with full marks. I got the elementary school certificate with a 9, just like many other children who didn't deserve it at all.

“Their mothers come and tell me: Give him a 9 on the certificate, otherwise my husband will beat him up”, explained Mr Panos to my mother.

Anyway, I can't see what this has to do with me: He could have given me a 10, because I deserved it this year, especially in comparison with some others.

There is another thing that's bringing me down too: Since the end of the school year, my good friend Angie has vanished. It is said that her family has moved to another city. This means that I shall never see her again...

Class A Gymnasium

Monday, 3rd November 1975

I am a pupil of gymnasium (junior high school) now and I can't say I like it: To me it's still an unknown place, with unknown faces. My old schoolmates are nowhere to see. Alone amongst hundreds of unfamiliar persons, I feel like a fish out of water. My self-confidence seems to be gone. I spent my first month here standing near the stairway for hours, while big parties of children were coming and going all around me, full of joy and liveliness. A few times I attempted to get into a circle and talk with the others, but as soon as I approached everybody got away at once, as if an alarm had sounded.

The only friend I managed to find was Lina, a beautiful, tall girl with long brown hair and good manners. She was very friendly to me and she also introduced me to her party. Yet, it's been a week now that Lina has disappeared from school and her friends have been avoiding me ever since. I will never see her again...

I sit alone at a desk in the left row. Right behind me, there is a corpulent lump sitting, called Nicky. All she does is pester me continuously, so much that I can hardly listen to the lessons. I often complain and tell her to get off my back, but she never lets me be. When I pay no heed to her, she starts hitting me or pushing her desk towards me, like a maniac. Sometimes she squashes me so bad that I can't even breathe.

This morning, during the ancient Greek lesson, she pushed her desk against me so violently that I got a terrible

backache and spent the whole hour crying. I wonder, though: The masters here are very strict. If you just whisper to somebody during the lesson, they throw you out of the class immediately. However, Nicky makes a din whenever she pesters me, but the masters never make the slightest remark to her.

Wednesday, 19th November 1975

There are also some boys, who go to the second class; whenever I see them on the way to school, they start screaming like lunatics: “Hey you, nitwit! You walk like a stork, you hen!” Only this morning did I realize they mean me! I can't do anything about it, so I just ignore them. Still I wonder: Why do they have it in for me? I'm nothing but an insignificant pupil of the first class. And another thing: The same boys happen to be my classmates in the English tutorial school, where I go twice a week. They pay absolutely no attention to me there. Isn't this weird?

Friday, 12th December 1975

I was standing alone beside the stairway, as usual, when a group of three girls approached me unexpectedly. They are all in my class, and they are all disabled: one of them suffers from very severe scoliosis, another always wears a collar around her neck, and the third one is on a wheelchair because her left leg is half a metre shorter than her right leg; nevertheless, she is an excellent student.

All three of them are polite and friendly, I am doing my best to go along with them, yet neither this friendship is meant to last: It will end very soon, without any specific reason, in a vague sadness.

Monday, 26th January, 1976

During the breaks I often get pestered by two arrant vixens from a higher class. As far as I have heard, they bother other children too. Obviously, they take pleasure in causing problems to lonely, shy pupils. I, who always stand alone by the stairway, am the ideal victim for them. Almost every day, they come and make fun of me or prick me with a needle.

In the second break today, they suddenly snatched my hair clip and ran away at once. When the bell rang, I dared go into their classroom and inform the mistress in front of everybody. Finally, they were obliged to give me my hair clip back. As I was leaving, I told them ironically: "Many happy returns!" The whole class burst into laughing.

Tuesday, 27th January 1976

However, I was not meant to relish that rare victory for long: This afternoon, right after school, the two termagants happened to get on the same bus as I did. So, they approached me stealthily from behind and snatched my hair clip again. I had to stand up, leave my seat and follow them to the rear of the bus, in order to get my hair clip back. They laughed mockingly and threw it down, close to their feet; I had to bend down in order to pick it up. Once again I felt the bitter taste of humiliation, let alone I lost my seat in the bus.

Wednesday, 11th February 1976

As about the problem "Vlassis", it still exists and it is getting worse: The psychopath has taken great care of making me famous in the underworld of the city. More often than not, I hear my name being cried out by hoodlums I have never seen before. I have marked out four brothers,

who often go around together with Vlassis: Each one of them is taller than the other, but none of them is taller than me; they all have the same nasty, angular, crimson face of a lunatic and whenever they see me they start calling me names: “Yvoooooonne! You cameeeeee! You giraaaaaffe!”

I really don't know what's going on around me; as I grow up, the world is becoming more and more insupportable, entirely unsuitable for me. I can hardly bear it any longer, as it's getting too difficult for me to adapt myself to its demands. I often wish I were someone else, someone “clever”, who can cope with life on this planet...

Monday, 1st March 1976

Today my class went on a day trip to Nafplio: I would have had a nice time if I had had company and if the boys sitting behind me hadn't been bothering me all the time. I was greatly surprised when I realized that they were those rogues who usually deride me on the road. *But how indeed? They are in a higher class!*

Anyway, to my bad luck they were sitting right behind me, constantly hitting my seat and making fun of me with aggressive cries and giggles. I just kept a stiff upper lip and didn't utter a word. There was nothing else to do. I couldn't even change seat, since the coach was chock-full.

Sunday, 14th March 1976

This morning I woke up in a very bad mood. I don't feel like playing on the road with my friends, or doing anything else; maybe because last night I accidentally eavesdropped a certain conversation between my father and his brother, uncle Andrew:

“What are you saying now about Yvonne? Alice is as sharp as a needle, Alice is a fly customer!” said my uncle, full of

admiration about my sister.

“Let me tell you,” replied dad. “Alice is cleverer than Yvonne, but Yvonne is a better pupil!”

“Big deal! Alice is better at everything else!”

I felt very sorry and started crying silently in my bed. It was almost midnight and everybody thought I was asleep.

Tuesday, 4th May 1976

As years go by, it gets more and more obvious that Alice is stealing the show from me. According to relatives and friends, she is always the “astute”, the “lively”, the “mincing hussy”, while I am the “quiet”, the “gawky”, the “slowcoach”. The truth is that I am getting taller and thinner: I am 1.67 m tall now, I weigh about 43 kilos and my body still remains entirely childlike.

Once again, this afternoon I heard compliments such as “You, beanpole!” and “Hey you! Lanky camel!” from strangers on the road. Moreover, I understand that pretty soon I will have to give up childhood and street games once for all. I neither want this to happen, nor become a “woman”.

As about Jasmine, she has already turned four. She is still very beautiful, still quadriplegic. She can neither stand, nor sit, nor talk. She can't even say “mum”. However, I don't mind spending hours with her in my lap, every time my parents need to be away from home -that is every day. I like rocking her on my knees, while listening to music for hours. If I leave her on her bed even for five minutes, she bursts into crying. I also accompany my mother to the center for spastic children, where we take Jasmine for kinesitherapy, although it has become obvious that these sessions bring no result at all.

In the evening I asked dad to help me with a maths problem. In the end, he told me bitterly: “I have a problem too: Jasmine has been ill ever since she was born; I have spent more than a million drachmas for her, but she has shown no improvement so far. When will Jasmine be cured?”

Wednesday, 5th May 1976

Something strange happened today at school, during the music lesson: The whole class was singing a song from our book, when suddenly I saw Mr Mantas, our fastidious music master, running towards me.

“Are you singing?” he asked the girl sitting in front of me, then the one next to her. They both answered affirmatively.

Finally, he asked me: “How about you? Are you singing?”

“Yes, I do” I replied.

He glared at me and ordered “Don't sing!”, leaving me dumbfounded. “I heard a dissonance somewhere here”, he explained quickly and returned to his seat at once.

... So, I will never sing with the others in class again. Maybe the master was right about the dissonance, the truth is that I have never been sweet-voiced. Yet, I wonder: There are sixty pupils in my class; only I was so out of tune, that the master had to prohibit me from singing? And he noticed that now, after so many months? What did he fear anyway? That I might spoil the serious concert?

Monday, 12th May 1976

During the music lesson, Mr Mantas called some pupils on the blackboard and told them to do a singing exercise and beat time with their hand as well. He also called Ivy, the star of our class, who admittedly performed very well. Then, it was my turn. I did my best and I sang the

piece as melodiously as I could, without making the slightest mistake in the notes or the tempo.

When I finished, I heard the master's verdict: "Alright; but I asked you to sing the notes, not recite them!" I stayed speechless and motionless for about five minutes. *But why? I have the impression that I did fine!* I wondered. In the end, I repeated the exercise hesitantly, with a trembling voice.

"Sit now", said Mr Mantas finally, making a sour face.

Friday, 25th June 1976

I finished the first class with a grade of 16, which is mediocre, not so auspicious for my future. All year long I have been jealous of Ivy, who kept the attendance register and always got a 19 or a 20 in all subjects. During the whole school year, she never took a lower mark, not even an 18, in some minor test.

Strange, though: Indeed she always excelled in all tests and examinations, but she never raised her hand in class and she was seldom asked to say the lesson. And another thing: Ivy kept the attendance register because she had got into gymnasium with a grade of 17.5. However, there were two other pupils who had managed to take an 18. Nevertheless, Ivy was the one who was chosen to take the attendance register...

Class B Gymnasium

Friday, 1st October 1976

Now that I am in the second class of gymnasium, my life seems to be taking an unexpected turn for the better. I can say I have become almost popular, since I talk with many children at school; my best friend is Mary Tsamis, a lively short girl who often bothers the teachers with her mischief. Strangely enough, the two of us are well-matched and we have fun together.

Moreover, I have also been admitted to the school choir! I, who last year wasn't allowed even to sing in class! I can hardly explain this, but I must say there is no music master at school this year. It's the physical education master who has undertaken the choir.

This morning we had history with an extremely strict mistress; she is the terror of the school because she throws out of the class any pupil who dares even whisper a word to a classmate during her lesson. This time she was bombarding us with lots of questions from the book of the previous class. I was the only one who raised her hand and answered them all.

"How do you know all this information about history?" a girl asked me later, during the break.

"I remember stuff from last year," I replied.

"I don't remember a thing from last year," she said smiling.

Saturday, 20th November 1976

Yesterday, as I woke up in the middle of the night and opened my eyes, I saw aunt Penelope facing me! She was

standing beside my bookcase, with her hands on my schoolbag and she was glaring at me! She was wearing a long white nightgown; in fact she was all white, like an apparition! I sat up in bed and kept observing her in wonder for some seconds. Then I tried to get up and ask her what she was doing in my room at this hour, but she vanished into thin air.

What was that, really? Do ghosts really exist, even ghosts of living persons? I'm sure that I saw this, it was not a dream, for I was not sleeping at the time...

Monday, 22nd November 1976

I feel very confident about my school performance this year, since I have done very well both in written tests and oral examinations. I'm such a good pupil, that some of my classmates smile to me in admiration and call me "a wiz-kid". However, due to certain coincidences (we were not given marks in most subjects), I got the first trimester report with an average grade of 12.2. I hope to have better results in the second trimester.

As about Jasmine, she is almost five years old and her health hasn't improved at all. "I will die soon if we go on like this, but that's the least; unless we find a reasonable solution to the problem, in the end we shall all perish", says my mother again and again, completely disappointed.

Eventually, my parents have decided there is no other solution but send Jasmine to a special asylum on the island of Leros. Taking into account that this asylum is the only one in the country that receives so helpless cases of disabled persons, we had to pull some strings in order to hurry things on. Otherwise, we would have to wait for ten years or so, and the consequences for my mother and the rest of us would be unpredictable.

Anyway, this is our last night together. Alice and I are sitting in the living room and we are recording Jasmine's favourite songs in two cassettes; she will take them, as well as an old tape recorder, with her in Leros. She is leaving home next morning...

Saturday, 27th November 1976

Mum has just returned home, together with my godmother who accompanied her in that sad trip to Leros. Things proved to be really nasty there: My mother was shocked and started screaming as soon as she found out the wretched living conditions of the inmates in that asylum. Actually, it actually occurred to her to bring back the infant, but she finally got aware that this was not an option. Therefore, she decided to leave our little sister there but arranged for Jasmine to have her own room, away from the other inmates, most of whom suffer from indescribable physical and mental disabilities. We won't forget her, of course. We intend to visit her as often as possible and make sure that she is properly taken care of.

... Ten days later we shall be informed by phone that Jasmine died of intestinal disorders. Only my mother and father will attend the funeral; Alice and I will stay at home, together with old aunt Diamanta from Piraeus. As we shall be informed after our parents' return, Jasmine was buried with her eyes open. No matter how hard the nurses tried, they didn't manage to close them.

Wednesday, 26th January 1977

As times goes by, my class proves to be the most obstreperous in the school. Our reputation reached even the Ministry of Education, when a smart aleck threw two pieces of chalk at the French mistress. Our religion master, Mr

Lazopoulos, gets into big trouble any time he gives us a lesson. All the children make fun of him because he is obsessed with religion and especially with St Nicolas. He always tells us to abstain from parties, popular songs, magazines, books etc because "these things are satanic!" He also says that all boys should become monks or priests and all girls nuns or nurses. At the end of each lesson, he wants us to copy a teaching and an adage from the Holy Bible and then he makes us sing a hymn of his inspiration to St Nicolas. The hubbub from the jarring notes and the rattles heard during that hymn, is difficult to describe. On the other hand, he never hesitates to whack the children really bad when they get on his nerves too much.

This morning Mr Lazopoulos gave us back the tests we had written a week before. Everything is perfect in my paper, there are no corrections, yet he has given me a mere 14 with two question marks. I wonder, what did I forget to write? "The teaching and the adage of the lesson," he told me when I asked him. But he hadn't asked for those in the test...

Friday, 25th February 1977

Since the beginning of this month, I have marked out a boy in my class: His name is George Franzis, and I am in love with him. He is tall and slender, he has big brown eyes with long eye-lashes, voluminous brown hair and a nice smile. He is very handsome. He usually wears clothes that are all in tints of the same colour: one day he is dressed in green, next day in crimson, then in brown, and so on. He is good-hearted, humorous and friendly to everybody, but I think he is a little selfish too. He is also very clever, the best boy pupil in the class. He has a sister, whose name is Rosita and she is one year older than us. She is an impressive

blonde with blue eyes and a strong personality. Sometimes, during the breaks, I watch her as she walks around in the schoolyard together with a friend of hers, and she never stops talking.

Every day I befuddle my mother with George's achievements. This morning we were given our reports for the second trimester and mum came to the school in order to receive mine. I sought to show George to her (being careful so that nobody else got wind of that, of course) as he walked past us, this time dressed in white.

“Isn't he gorgeous?” I asked mum and waited for her affirmation.

Yet, she guffawed and said: “Who, him? But he is just a baby!”

“Isn't he handsome?” I insisted.

“He is fine, but he is only a kid! Almost a baby! What is there about him, to fall in love with?”

I was really bewildered at mum's reaction: George is 13 years old, just like I am, but he is very tall and good-looking. He certainly isn't “a kid”. Anyway, what was mum expecting me to show her? Some thirty-year-old man?

... From now on, any time I speak to mum about George, she will always respond: “Big deal! He is only a child! Next year you will have forgotten all about him!”

Thursday, 12th May 1977

It was a nice day today at school. The literature mistress asked us a question and I was the only one who knew the answer. In the third hour we had a French test and I did very well; I expect to be given an 18. When the bell rang, Franzis approached and asked me about the subjects of the test. He believed he had written perfectly, but I showed him that he had made a mistake. He started swearing at

himself. He was funny.

We finished school one hour earlier, because the anthropology mistress was absent. All pupils had already left, except me, Mary, George and Mark. George kept calling me and Mary “traitors”. We were still laughing, when suddenly the two boys had a fight. Mark, who is rather corpulent, was chasing George all over the classroom, with the wastepaper basket in hand. He finally managed to corner him, George raised his hands in surrender, but Mark made him wear the basket like a hat. We all laughed our heads off.

Saturday, 14th May 1977

Today we didn't have any lessons, because the masters had a meeting. Instead, we found a ball and played “the apples” in class. As soon as I threw the ball once, it landed on a boy's face and he started crying. In the meanwhile, the chemistry mistress was coming and we all fled after we had hidden the ball. As soon as we got out, in the schoolyard, the head master called me and asked me to dump about a dozen of cardboard boxes in a barrel. When my classmates saw me, they shouted: “Presents for Yvonne!”

While I was waiting at the bus stop after school, George was standing a little farther, in the company of his friends. Soon, three girls were seen walking at the opposite side of the road. Each of them was holding an ice cream. George started kidding them: “Hey, you three, I want some candy too!”. The girls didn't pay any attention but he insisted: “Hey, I'm talking to you three! I want some candy!” The girls kept on walking down the street unruffled, while we were laughing.

“Hey, you! I mean you three! Haven't you counted yourselves yet?” asked George with humour.

Sunday, 15th May 1977

This morning we had an unexpected visit from uncle Sebastian, my father's second cousin, whom I had never seen before. He arrived with his wife and his three sons, who are 14, 10 and 4 years old. My sister and I played with them cheerfully for many hours, turning the whole house upside down. We all had a whale of a time.

I think it's the first time in my life that I have played so freely, without worrying that somebody might mock or trick me! I can't explain why, but I could really be myself with these boys. In the afternoon, we went swimming in the beach of Glyfada, and then we ate fish and calamari at a seaside taverna. I felt very sorry when they left, late in the evening.

Monday, 16th May 1977

Today the literature mistress was absent, so we had no lesson for two hours. The children spent their time playing SOS on the blackboard. I showed them how many SOSes there were. Everybody said I am a live wire (good for me). Then I played SOS with Louise Hoidas, at her desk. We should have played on the blackboard, because I beat her by 8-1.

The last lesson of the day was physical education. After we had finished, there were only some boys, Mary and I in the classroom. George wanted to take off his track-suit and asked us girls to leave. Yet, we weren't in a hurry to do so. "I'm taking it off!" George threatened. Finally we left, but when we got downstairs Mary remembered that she had left her jacket in the classroom. I was more than willing to fetch it. Franzis had not taken off his clothes yet. I just took the jacket and got away. "Yvonne is a good girl, she is leaving!" said George with a sweet smile.

Tuesday, 17th May 1977

Early this morning we set off on a school day trip to Costa. Our coach was an old flivver. At some traffic lights the driver applied the brakes too late and we crashed into another car. It was a funny accident. We all got off and pushed the other car forward. In the meantime, the oil reservoir of our coach was broken and the black liquid was spilt on the asphalted road. We waited there for about an hour, until they sent us another coach and another driver. Due to the unexpected delay, we finally went to Loutraki instead of Costa.

All pupils were left loose in a wood. Mary and I joined George's party. I was feeling on top of the world but I was so fluttered that I couldn't utter a word. All at once, Mary started throwing grits at George. He tried to reciprocate but Mary kept hiding behind me, so George hit me instead of her and then he said "sorry, sorry".

A little later we discovered an old restaurant that served nothing but beer. George drank a whole bottle of beer by himself and then he was complaining that his head was spinning. Later on, we all gathered together and took lots of photographs.

On the way back to school, Franzis came and sat next to me. I don't know why, but during the whole journey we didn't exchange a word. Someone joked that he and I are in love and that we shall get married one day. George grimaced in embarrassment and I pretended I hadn't listened.

In the rear of the coach, there were about ten children smoking. Suddenly, one of the masters went to them but instead of punishing them, he asked for a cigarette. One of the girls had a chest pain, probably because of the too many cigarettes she had smoked.

When we arrived at school, late in the evening, George was one of the first pupils who got into the classroom. As soon as he saw me coming, he raised his hands and cried out: "Hello, Yvonne!". I greeted him back, with a cheerful smile. Maybe he loves me too...

Friday, 20th May 1977

This is my luckiest day ever: As soon as I entered the classroom I saw that, for some strange reason, the rows of desks in my class are now five instead of four that were till yesterday. I found it a little strange because in all classes, in all schools, there are always four rows of desks, never five. Yet, the most surprising thing is that Franzis happens to be sitting right next to me now! We are very close, separated only by a 30cm-wide aisle! He smiled to me, I smiled back. He asked me about my mark in ancient Greek. He smiled again. He got the same mark too.

I had to change desk for the anthropology test and a classmate asked me if I would help him. When I said yes, he started chasing my hand so as to kiss it. Finally, we didn't have that test because:

- a) The mistress was in a bad mood,
- b) The boy she asked to fetch the papers came back too late,
- c) She got so angry, that she dismissed all the boys from the class. Only George asked to stay.

Then the mistress made a speech on how useless men are, until the bell rang and we all got away.

Monday, 23rd May 1977

We had a test in ancient Greek the other day, and this morning we were given our corrected papers back. My George was given an imperial 06. I'll never forget the wry face he made as soon as he saw it. The next lesson was

history, and I was the only one who raised her hand and answered the mistress's questions. "You are a secret genius!" George told me smiling.

This evening, my sweet sister got on my nerves because she wanted me to give her exactly half of the photos of artists I have clipped out of magazines. She wanted them here and now, she grumbled and grumbled, until I flew off the handle and gave her a clout. She turned on the waterworks at once, mum ran to see what was wrong and Alice moaned that I hit her: "...and I have a terrible headache now!" -the usual performance. Mum glared at me, she ordered me to give half of my photos to Alice, I refused, and my sister resorted to her strongest argument:

"If you don't beat her up, I will vomit!" and she started the act right away.

As expected, mum got furious: "You, big one, give those photos to the kid!" she groaned, while Alice was whining with crocodile tears: "Aaaaaah, my head!"

Then mum pounced on me, shouting: "What did you do to the poor kid, she's only half your age, you big one, you gawk!"

In order to avoid repetition of the usual incident, just like the previous time when mum pushed me down on the floor and started kicking and beating me, I stood up immediately and ran away from home. I was absent from home for a couple of hours, and when I came back mum didn't dare utter a word. With the above strategy, I managed not to get beaten up almost every day, at the age of fourteen...

Wednesday, 25th May 1977

I was given a 16 in the physics test of Monday, although I had written perfectly and expected a 19-20. Why,

indeed? Anyway, during the lesson the mistress called me and five other pupils for an oral examination on the blackboard. That mischief of Jason was standing before me. As soon as his turn came, he suddenly pushed me in front of him and I found myself in his place. The whole class laughed. Yet, the mistress got wind of his little trick, so it didn't wash. I did very well in the oral examination and got an 18. As I was returning to my desk, Franzis smiled to me tenderly. In the fourth hour we had to write an essay with a free subject. I chose to write about "My best friend". George wrote about "Mother". I think his essays are silly.

On my way home by bus, the conductor had run out of 50-cent coins, so all pupils had to pay 4 drachmas for the ticket, instead of the usual 3.50. My George kept joking all the way, making happy everyone in the bus. Yet, when his turn came, he found out that he had only three drachmas in his pocket. "Your trick is too old!" the conductor told him sharply. George flinched as if he were scared. Then he received his ticket with trembling hands, while the other passengers were laughing.

"I'll get off at the next bus stop and go home to get those 50 cents!" Franzis went on.

"Stop playing jokes on me!" said the conductor annoyed.

"Alright, I stop!"

Thursday, 9th June 1977

Today is the first day of the final examinations, starting with Greek literature. We had to write an essay with the subject "A chapel on top of the hill". We also had to analyze the Olympic Hymn. I had left my book at home accidentally, and the boy sitting in front of me was kind enough to lend me his for a while. So, I could study the hymn and write its main idea on a page for him to copy.

Moreover, he kept nagging me to help him with the essay. Another boy tried to cheat in the exam, but he was caught red handed by the invigilator. Someone joked: "Miss, this is not a crib-sheet, this is a love-letter!". Everybody burst out laughing. Another genius had opened his book down on the floor and kept reading from it. He managed well, without being caught.

Anyway, this is the worst day of my life, since the school year is actually over. Unfortunately, George Franzis is writing in the next classroom. This means that we have been separated, and I don't like this at all. Yet, I like to think that our summer separation will only be temporary...

Friday, 17th June 1977

We had the history exam today. As I was handing out the sheets of paper, someone smiled to me and said: "You are giving me the sheet? I will get a 20!". This time I almost got disqualified because I let the boy behind me copy from my paper and the invigilator got wind of it. Anyway, I'm pleased with what I have written.

I was just leaving when I noticed about twenty sheets of paper which had fallen on the floor, at the threshold of the next classroom. The examination was over, the room was empty and the master had left without realizing that some papers had slipped off his hands. I started browsing among them anxiously, until I discovered that one of them was George's! I was tempted to run off with it and keep it as a memento, without telling anyone. However, I thought about it again, I saw it wasn't a right thing to do and I called a mistress who was passing by at that moment.

Saturday, 25th June 1977

This morning we had our last examination, on

housekeeping. The subjects were a piece of cake. I expect to be given a 19-20. When I finished and got out in the schoolyard, George came near and talked to me *-I hope not for the last time ever*. He said that he was going to have the geography exam later because he was absent on Wednesday, when the rest of us took that exam.

After school, Mary Tsamis invited me to her house in Voula. It proved to be a nice villa with a tiled roof and a big garden. Her mother was not at home and her father had prepared chicken soup for lunch. Tomorrow, Mary and her parents are leaving for the island of Salamis, where they have a cottage. I will phone them as soon as the results of the exams come out.

* * *

Wednesday, 30th June 1977

My father arrived home this morning, after many months on a small merchant ship called "Tiny Luck". We were astounded to hear that three hours before he left the ship, fire broke out; unless he had been awake, they would have all been burnt to death. He has brought us a TV set, a tape recorder and other things from abroad. Yet, due to the slow customs clearance, the items haven't arrived in time and dad has been swearing all day.

In the afternoon, daddy took me and Gregory to the ship. We explored it from stem to stern and then we stayed in the captain's cabin, where we read books and ate roasted gourd-seeds. We had a nice time until it got dark and we returned home.

Thursday, 1st July 1977

The school results have just come out: I have passed

the class with an average grade of 17 -better than last year. Especially the exams marks are very good, almost 18 in average. Mr Christopher, a decent veteran air force officer who lives with his wife right across the street, gave me 200 drachmas as a gift. He was very happy about my success. Anybody who hears about my good marks, hardly believes it. *Why, really?* The only sad mishap is that my friend Mary didn't manage to move up.

One thing is certain: I'm never going to forget this wonderful school year...

Thursday, 7th July 1977

This afternoon my mother took me to an orthopedist in Athens. We wanted to have my back examined, because it doesn't seem to be completely straight recently. The doctor, a fat disagreeable man, told me to get undressed as soon as he saw me. I left only my underwear on, and after a quick examination he diagnosed: "cyphosis, lordosis, and scoliosis of 6 degrees! Also, thorax stenosis! Can't you see what a narrow chest she has?". As about the prescribed treatment, it is a nasty orthopedic belt that will cover my whole body from shoulders to pelvis! I will have to wear it until I am eighteen, said the doctor. Then he gave us the address of his brother's shop, where such belts are made.

As soon as we got out of the surgery, I burst into crying. "Don't cry like this, my girl, such things happen to lots of people," said an unknown woman who saw me and was interested. *Lots of people? Really? How many people wear such an orthopedic belt?* I wondered and kept on weeping all the way to the bus stop.

Saturday, 23rd July 1977

Around noon my mother, my sister and I paid a visit

to Mrs Lucy, a young neighbour who lives next door. After a while we started talking about ghosts, and Lucy told us that she knows how to summon spirits! We were very surprised when she fetched a Holy Bible at once. Amongst its pages there was a pencil sticking out and it was tied to the book with a string.

Lucy explained that spiritualism is dangerous because spirits absorb energy from those who summon them, rendering them prone to accidents and misfortunes. Then she told us about her sister-in-law, who had called a spirit the other day and three days later she was killed in a car crash together with her little daughter. "But you are in no danger, because I am the one who will summon the spirit; nor is it anything satanic, since we are using the Holy Bible," she reassured us and started saying The Lord's Prayer. She kept her index fingers stuck to the pencil, which was fixed vertically in between; both her palms were facing the floor and the book was hanging under her two hands.

As soon as Lucy finished the prayer, she called the spirit of my grandmother, Alice, who died six years ago. It was expected to answer our questions either with a "yes" (turning the Holy Bible to the right) or with a "no" (turning the Holy Bible to the left).

"Grandma Alice, do you love Marietta?" asked Lucy about my mother. "Yes", answered the spirit.

Then, Lucy asked the same about my sister and me, and the spirit answered gave positive answers again.

"Grandma, do you love me?" ... "No".

"She doesn't love me!" said the neighbour, rather worried.

"Will Yvonne finish the third class of gymnasium with a high grade?" my mum wanted to know.

The spirit answered "yes" very quickly.

"Will Yvonne get higher education?"

The book turned to the right, but very slowly.

“Look, how hard it is for her to say yes,” commented Lucy.

At that moment, I thought of getting an answer to a tantalizing query I've had ever since I was an infant; yet, I didn't wish to express it aloud, but only mentally. After the spiritualist had assured me that this could be done, I concentrated and made the following question:

Grandma, tell me, am I clever?

The book didn't move at all.

I repeated the mental question.

Once again, the book stayed motionless.

“She didn't like the question”, said the neighbour.

Then, my sister took the Holy Bible in her hands; some more questions were made and the book kept turning right or left, just like before. Therefore, it was not Lucy who was doing that somehow, as I had initially suspected.

“Are you tired, grandma?” asked Lucy then, and she got a positive answer.

“She has to go”, said the spiritualist impatiently.

She took the book in her hands again, she said The Lord's Prayer once more and then she asked the spirit to leave.

“Grandma Alice, have you left?” asked Lucy finally.

The book turned to the left.

“She is still here! But she must leave!” she exclaimed anxious.

Lucy repeated the prayer and when she asked again, the book turned to the right.

“If grandma is gone, how did the book turn?” I wondered.

“That was the last turn, as the spirit was leaving” explained Lucy.

Sunday, 7th August 1977

During the summer, Mary and I have become better

friends. She often invites me to her house, where I stay for two or three days; we play board games, volleyball or rackets in the street, we go on long walks to the park, or we watch nice films in the local cinema. Sometimes we meet Kate, a peer neighbour. She is a nice girl, with curly red hair and a suntanned skin. She has known Mary ever since they both went to primary school.

This afternoon I happened to see Mary's school report of the second trimester. It had been left under an ashtray in the living room. I couldn't resist the temptation, so I took it in my hands and when I looked at it, I could hardly believe my eyes: She had excellent marks, over 17, in all subjects! Yet, Mary has always been a mediocre pupil, usually getting a 13-14 on average! Moreover, in the end she didn't manage to move up and she has to repeat the second class! I looked again carefully, trying to make out if her marks had been "corrected" (for example, a 13 can easily become an 18), but no, that was not the case. Then I imagined that her parents had bought a report sheet from somewhere and filled it in with the desired marks, in order to show it off to relatives and friends. And the seal of the school? How had it been stamped? *Isn't this a mystery...*

Friday, 19th August 1977

I have been in Mary's cottage in Salamis for a week now. We are having a great time together, going on long walks, swimming, or playing board games. Every day we meet Kate, whose cottage happens to be nearby, and we have lots of fun. I have impressed everybody with my overall knowledge, as well as with my ability in doing crosswords. My self-confidence grows day by day, as I feel that the others are fond of me.

This is one of the happiest summers in my life, yet I am looking forward to the new school year, so that I can meet my George again...

Phase Two: Descent

Class C Gymnasium

Monday, 5th September 1977

Full of joy and optimism, my mother and I went to the school this morning so as to enroll me in the third class of gymnasium. However, mum had the brilliant idea of giving our true address (13, Nereid st.), instead of the fictitious one (24, Tyrtaios st.) we had given the previous two years. As a result, I was not admitted at the high school of Glyfada because Nereid street is out of its territory. We were told I should go to the gymnasium of Argyroupolis, miles from nowhere, at the foot of Mount Hymettus. Willy-nilly we took a taxi and went there, but I wasn't admitted to that school either; according to the masters, our address is in the territory of the high school of St Tryfon -which is the most reasonable thing.

We got away at the double and ended up at the above school, which is situated near the homonymous church. It looked rather gloomy, and it was full of pupils and parents who were trying to get stowed in its poky rooms. I didn't want at all to enroll in it, as it was ugly and in a bad state of repair; besides, it had a bad reputation. Last but not least, I was sure that George Franzis would never come here.

I was really relieved when I heard that neither in that school could I be admitted! According to the pudgy physical education mistress, who was responsible for the enrollments, I was supposed to attend the high school of Argyroupolis. We explained that we had just come from there but she

wouldn't listen. So, we took another taxi and went back to Argyroupolis. To no avail, of course.

Finally, I was admitted in the gymnasium of St Tryfon, after my mother had begged a lot. I could feel my heart sinking, as the image of George was already fading in my conscience. When we took the way back home, we were both exhausted and sad...

Wednesday, 21st September 1977

This is my first day in the third class. I looked everywhere, hoping to see any old classmates from the unforgettable B4 of last year, I hoped to find some, but I only met the two Christides sisters, who were very friendly to me. Only they and I have ended up here.

This means I'm never going to see all those dear persons again, most of all my George! I have lost him for ever. The more I realize it, the more I get depressed. Let alone that all the boys here are complete nonentities in comparison with George. All I can have from him now, is memories...

Monday, 10th October 1977

I don't think I will manage to participate in the parade of the 28th October this year. For some strange reason, the nasty physical education mistress hates me and she just refuses to include me in the file.

“Won't Yvonne come to the parade?” a girl wondered.

“What is Yvonne good for?” answered the mistress ironically.

It's not that I'm looking forward to taking part in the stupid parade. However, if I don't participate, I will get a very bad mark in physical education, which will lower the average grade of the school report. Therefore, I had better

inform my mother about this.

Tuesday, 18th October 1977

After my mother's complaints yesterday, the physical education mistress finally had to include me in the file, in the very first row because of my height. The other pupils have been looking at me askance ever since. In fact, the whole school has been talking about me, calling me a "mollycoddle". During the rehearsals for the parade, my schoolmates never stop admonishing me: "Move your arms higher!" ... "Make bigger steps!" ... "Go slower!" etc.

This morning they really got on my nerves, so I turned back and told Joanna, who was the lead singer of the serenade: "Why, are you jealous that I am in the first row?" They all shut up at the moment, but I could feel they were already plotting the reprisals.

... On the day of the parade, the whole school will gather along the coastal road of Glyfada, and wait for our turn to march before the town dignitaries. As soon as Nelly Christides saw me, she groaned sarcastically: "So, you are here! Couldn't you have broken your leg and not have come?". I didn't utter a word; I was only speechless at such malice from a person I considered a friend.

Thursday, 3rd November 1977

As soon as the bus to school came and the door opened before me, I came face to face with an unknown pupil, who was looking at me mockingly. All at once he saluted me like a soldier and shouted: "Heil Hitler!". The whole bus shook with laughter. I got on as if nothing had happened, totally ignoring the derisive giggles around me. Anyway, the trump was not alone, he was in a big gang. Trumps never go about alone. If I had reacted anyhow,

things would have become even worse for me...

Friday, 18th November 1977

Frankly, I just can't understand what is happening to me: Although I have found myself in a foreign environment, away from the old good classmates and away from George, for the last two months I have been doing my best to show positivity and adaptability, so as to fit in my new school. I am one of the best pupils, and I also push myself to approach and talk to some children during the breaks. I try really hard to get over my innate inclination to solitude and shyness, which had abated last year; yet, now it has grown again because of the extreme hostility I have to confront every day.

Despite my endeavors to fit in, the result seems to be poor if not negative. I really don't know why, but I have become the laughing-stock of the whole school. For the time being, the only thing I can do is show indifference.

The only girls who talk to me are the two Christides sisters, with whom I return home every day after school. This afternoon they advised me to be more extrovert, cheerful and friendly towards the other children: "They think you are selfish and haughty. That's why some spread bad rumours about you, saying that you are uppish, foolish and obsessed with religion. Unless you change your attitude, they will never stop deriding you", concluded Stella, while Nelly was smiling enigmatically.

Saturday, 26th November 1977

Every day I have to wear this horrible orthopedic belt, which makes my breathing hard and gives my body an unnaturally straight posture; let alone it doesn't really hide my cyphosis, since it doesn't prevent my shoulders from

drooping. Every morning, when I put it on, I feel like throwing up. Moreover, this belt has worsened my aerophagia, which first appeared last year. When I get sick with it, I can hardly breathe, I feel like choking, and it doesn't go away unless I lie in bed.

I have some other health problems too: Since last month I have been suffering from a strange eye illness that makes my eyes blink continuously and uncontrollably. In addition, a stammer I've had since I was a child, has deteriorated remarkably. Also, my hair has become too greasy, wild and scanty; "diffused alopecia", diagnosed the doctor.

This morning, as soon as the bell rang for the third break, a classmate approached me. It was Peter, a well known trump and bully, together with four of his friends. He smiled ironically and sought to deride my blinking and stutter: "Do... do... do you know that... that... that... you are very... ry... ry beautiful?" There followed a torrent of giggles and jeers.

Monday, 5th December 1977

It has become a real torture for me to stand anywhere within the school premises. For some mysterious reason, I am a target for about 200 persons! No matter where I am at school, I always hear mocking giggles, malevolent hints like "a nasty giraffe" or "a stupid religious hen", jeers, vomit-like exclamations, ostentatious spits. It seems there is always something about me they don't like: my oily hair, my excessive height (1,77 m), my thin and still undeveloped body (45 kilos), the way I walk, the way I talk. When I answer back to the jeers, they call me "vixen". When I ignore them, they call me "stupid".

After the second break today, as soon as I got into the

classroom, Dimitri Haribdis hastened towards me and got on my way, holding a broomstick in his hand (where did he find that?). “You ain't passing, you tart!” he said, chuckling maliciously. I don't know what that word means exactly, but it didn't sound good. Anyway, I wanted to go to my desk, so I pushed the broomstick away with all my strength. “You, tart!” he roared again and sought to stop me with his plump body. I pushed him aside and made for my desk. “You can't take on girls!” said someone, and the rest of the pupils laughed.

Wednesday, 7th December 1977

During the sixth hour, while we were having a lesson of religion, those rascals of my classmates managed to get on my nerves again: I was sitting alone at the last desk, as usual, when I realized that everybody was looking my way, guffawing irrepressibly. I blushed of embarrassment, unable to imagine why. After half an hour of giggles and sly looks, Helen, who's sitting in front me, decided to turn back and enlighten me: “Your legs...” she whispered to me.

“What?”

“Close them!”

I obeyed at once and the whole class burst into wild laughter. The master didn't utter a word and waited patiently for the uproar to settle.

However, now that I am thinking about it more calmly, I wonder: I sit at the last desk, on the right side of the room; beside and in front of me there are rows and rows of seated pupils. So, how is it possible that somebody actually saw “something” down there, taking into account that my pinafore is of midi length?

Saturday, 10th December 1977

I never expected that to happen, but it happened this afternoon: My mother discovered my secret diary, a big red notebook, where I write down my everyday experiences (constantly being derided by the whole school), how I feel (sorrow, disappointment, self-pity), and what I can do about it (whatever I do is never enough). This diary is my only ally in life, since I don't dare talk to anybody about my problems in this wretched school. Every time I try to say something to mum, her only advice is "Don't be sad and don't pay any attention to them. You must always show good manners".

Anyway, as soon as she read my diary, she got out of control: "Come here, you, nitwit! What inanities have you written here? "Dear red notebook, I am alone in the world, everybody hates me, you are my only friend"! What's this? Are you sick or something? Let me catch you at such nonsense again!"

Then, she tore my notebook to bits, she pushed me on the bed and started smacking and pinching me all over, shouting in a shrill voice: "Why are you complaining about your life, you ungrateful bitch? When I was at your age, I worked all day and gave all my money to my parents! I wasn't left a drachma! Are you listening to me, you fool? Non even one drachma!"

... and she kept on hitting and pinching me, while I was begging her to stop. I spent the rest of the day crying and wondering why she hates me so much.

Monday, 19th December 1977

I was in a hurry to leave for the English tutorial school but the belt of my skirt was nowhere to find. I told my mother, she managed to find it after a lot of search, and brought it to me mumbling angrily "dead loss, you dead

loss". Then she tried to help me put it on but she tightened it around my waist so furiously, that I could no longer breathe. I felt very dizzy, I lay in bed and finally missed the English lesson. "Have I really done so much harm to you?" whined mum, putting on her usual martyred look.

Monday, 23rd January 1978

This is the first day in our new school, which is situated at the site "Little Bridge", right opposite to the mountain. The building is very nice, painted in tints of beige and yellow, but the desks were dusty. My classroom is on the first floor. All pupils were dismissed one hour too soon this evening, because a light bulb caught fire and we were told to go away.

I am optimistic about this change. I feel that things will get better for me from now on. My alopecia has been cured and the blinking is gone. Even my terrible colds are not so terrible any more, thanks to some new antihistamines. This winter I got sick only three times and each cold lasted five or six days; not eight months non-stop, like it did until last year.

Moreover, I think I'm falling in love again: This time it's with Alex Tello, the best pupil in the class. He is in the bad habit of sucking up to the masters all day, but he is very clever and handsome.

Tuesday, 21st February 1978

This morning we were given the algebra tests back. I got an 18. There were no mistakes on my paper. The only thing marked in red was the phrase "very good" written in the end. *By the way, why an 18 and not a 20?*

I think I have got two new problems: During the last break I noticed that two classmates, who hadn't given me a

reason to think about them so far, were looking at me askance, gossiping and giggling continuously. I'll see what I'll do with them.

Saturday, 25th February 1978

This is the happiest Saturday of my life: I was the class monitor and Alex, my darling, lied to me that he had been given permission to stay in during the second break. Then, he looked at me tenderly and asked me to show him the solution to a maths problem. In the next break he told me the same lie. This time he wanted me to help him with a geometry exercise. I have the impression he loves me.

In the afternoon I told mum all about Alex and his growing interest in me, and she took the occasion to give me the usual lecture -the same ever since I was an infant:

“You must be careful with men, or some shrewd guy will fool you and then dump you like a squeezed lemon! Always remember that good girls don't go out on dates. You must never go to a cafeteria with a man. If you do, he will certainly put drugs in your drink and then he will do to you whatever he wants!”

“Really?” I wondered. “All boys do that?”

“Yes, they all do that!”

“You mean, all these young guys who go to cafeterias with their girlfriend, put drugs in her drink? All of them? At the same time?”

“Yes, this is exactly what they do, all of them! That's why you should never go out with a man! A woman must be clever, not be fooled by trumps. So, listen to what I'm saying: When you grow up and get into university, you will meet some handsome undergraduate, but you won't go on a date with him. You will only sit with him on a bench once or twice, just for some minutes. Then you will explain to him

that you are a decent girl with moral principles and that you can't be knocking about with someone who's not your husband -and risk being seen by a neighbour! So, you will tell him to come and ask your father for your hand! If he is worthy, he will understand and he will marry you as soon as possible. If he is not, let him go!", concluded mum, with an air of expertise.

I guess she could be right, yet I wonder: Why doesn't she ever say these things to my sister?

Saturday, 11th March 1978

This morning we had no lessons at school; instead we had a fancy dress party, on the occasion of the carnival season. Panos and Peter came dressed up as women and Joanna as a beggar. They went to the headmistress's office and she kissed them. All pupils were dismissed at 11:00 o'clock. I left with Virna, with whom we sit together at the same desk, and another friend of hers, whose name is Kate. As we were walking down the road talking and laughing, suddenly Kate confided in us that Alex is in love with her and that he has told her so! Good heavens!

In the afternoon I paid a visit to my good friend, Mary. We listened to some records and talked about the new cinema films. Later on, we went to a party thrown by a friend of hers. It proved to be a flop: The hostess had invited fifteen girls and fifteen boys from her class, but only eight girls turned up. Anyway, that was the first time I danced in front of other people. While I was dancing, an unknown girl accosted me:

"Sorry, do you go to the gym?"

"No," I answered.

"To a dance school?" asked another one.

"No, nothing like that."

I began to wonder where they were getting at.

“To a swimming pool?”

“Neither.”

“You should have answered "yes",” was Mary's opinion, when I told her. Obviously, the ladies were making fun of me...

Saturday, 18th March 1978

Aunt Penelope has started her old tricks again: Every time she meets me, she sends me on errands: “Go there and buy me that”. More often than not, when I return from an errand she immediately sends me on another one. I can't put up with this any more.

Yesterday evening she happened to see me in my yard, as I had just returned from school.

“Yvonne, come here!” she called but I was not at all in the mood for running here and there at this hour.

“I can't, I have work to do!” I replied sharply and made for the back door, without even looking at her.

This morning aunt Penelope came over and began to complain at once:

“I called Yvonne last night because I wanted to give her some pastry, but she told me she had work to do and she refused to come. So, those delicious cakes were finally eaten by other people! Bad for you!”

“I was tired,” I excused myself awkwardly.

The good thing is that it will be a long time until she sends me on errands again.

Monday, 21st March 1978

Finally, I have realized that Mr Tellos is a mean little man, full of vulgarity and selfishness. I've heard so by many girls but I refused to believe it, until I saw it my own eyes

this morning: The great lover is in the habit of sending love letters to all the girls in the class. During the geometry lesson, I stole a glance at a written message he had just sent to Virna: “You pussy is very nice”, it read. When I saw it, I was taken aback. The other girls seem to be flattered with messages like this, but I don't want to know him any more!

Saturday, 1st April 1978

April Fools' Day today. According to the old custom, people tell any lies they want so as to trick the others and have fun. As soon as the bell rang for the first lesson, we changed classrooms with C3, hoping to miss physics. Nevertheless, the physicist came and gave us the lesson although we were in another room, while the mathematician went to the others who had occupied our classroom. So, our little trick didn't wash.

In the second hour we had algebra and we came up with a new plan: All girls from C3 and C4 gathered in the classroom of C4, while all boys were in the classroom of C3. However, when the mathematician and the literature mistress arrived, they made us return to our classrooms. So, neither this time did we shirk the lesson.

During the next break I met Dora, whom I've known ever since we were in primary school. Sometimes we talk, but we've never been close friends. I was surprised when she invited me to her birthday party, which is tomorrow.

In the fourth hour Mr Tello sent me a love-letter signed with the name of another classmate. It read “You are very beautiful, I love you”. I gave no answer. In the sixth hour, during the history lesson, Alex sent me three more messages but I didn't even deign to read them.

Poor thing, he thought that all girls were dying for one of his famous love-letters! Let alone it's already the talk of

the class that the “lady-killer” keeps sending me letters that I just ignore. I had lots of fun today!

Sunday, 2nd April 1978

At 7.30 in the evening I went to Dora's party. Firstly I was astounded at the size of her house, then at its luxury. It is a real palace! Yet, the most unusual thing was that I felt quite comfortable there: Strangely enough, it was easy for me to talk to many of the guests, most of whom I had never seen before. Someone was telling hilarious jokes and we were all laughing, while waiting for Dora's older brother to give us the record player. He and his friends were behind closed doors, in another room, and they needed the record player because they were in the middle of a strange role playing game called “President of the USA” or something like this.

A little later, when the game ended, the older boys came out of the room and danced with us. A tall, gorgeous man asked to dance with me. I felt somewhat embarrassed because I'm not used to dancing, and when I do I am a little clumsy. I left the party at ten o' clock, according to mum's advice. When I got home, there were two delicious skewers waiting for me on the kitchen table.

Thursday, 6th April 1978

This is the most revealing day of my life: Only today did I finally realize what kind of “angels” all my classmates are, but most of all three bitches who seem to have all the strings in their hands. What happened to me this morning, was not a simple hoax. I don't want to go to school tomorrow. I am awfully ashamed of myself and scared stiff of what I am going to face. Now I'm certain that all of them have been trying to destroy me, especially my soul. They

eventually managed it today. I am already full of hatred. I want to take revenge. I want to kill, not only the three bitches, but all my classmates.

Let's take things from the start: During the whole week, that "lady-killer" of Alex kept sending silly love-letters to me as well as to all the girls in the class. Not only did I refuse to answer them, but I also avoided even to open them, because he often gets vulgar.

This morning he didn't send me anything; however, these three harlots thought it would be funny to write some false love-letters for me, signed with his name. It was evident that the first three messages were phoney because the handwriting didn't match. However, the fourth one was so perfect that I believed it was really Alex who had sent it. In the meantime, I was under tremendous pressure from all the other girls: "If you don't answer the messages, everybody will think you are too silly to understand!" Antonia told me and the others seconded her promptly. So, I decided to reply, asking him never to bother me again.

The disaster reached a peak during the break: Those three rascals wrote another message for me, Tellos happened to see it and he started pulling my leg. I felt extremely ashamed and disappointed. I wished I were dead. But it didn't stop there: Now the whole school is deriding me, they are calling me names, they all believe I'm stupid, and I have no idea on how to prove the opposite. The only thing I really want, is to blow up the classroom with everybody inside! I hate them all! I don't know how to get even with them. What can I do? Who can help me? Nobody, I'm afraid.

As soon as I got home, I went to my room and burst out crying for the rest of the afternoon. My mother saw that something was wrong and she urged me to tell her everything. After a lot of hesitation, I told her the whole

story. To my surprise, she didn't advise me to “forgive, forget, and show good manners”, as usual. Instead, she listened to me with interest and understanding; she even persuaded me to write down on a piece of paper the names of the three harlots: Helen Fourakis, Mary Tripis, Anna Tsaldaris.

“...But I want you to promise that you will neither come to school and complain, nor mention anything to anybody about them,” I said.

“Don't worry, I know what to do,” she reassured me.

Friday, 7th April 1978

I had the time of my life at school today: We were having a chemistry lesson, when Antonia suddenly started whining “...but we've knocked it off...” (apparently, she had done something too), while many of my classmates were fidgeting at their desks, full of worry. I wondered why and then I saw my mother in the schoolyard, heading for the headmistress's office.

When the bell rang, everybody came to me, one by one, and asked anxiously: “Did you mum say anything about me?” ... “Or about me?” and so on. I assured them that I had no idea about my mother's initiative, probably they didn't believe me, I couldn't care less. Even Alex Tellos was pale with fear:

“Did your mother mention anything about me? That was not my fault!” he said timidly.

“I don't know, maybe!” I replied.

He was scared stiff but he tried to play it cool. As about the three rogues, they almost admitted their guilt; and they were no longer in the mood for tricks and nonsense.

As soon as the headmistress got into our classroom, she showered abuse on everybody, she also said she knew

about the three ladies; then she gave us a geography test, I didn't know a thing, I couldn't care less either. Oh, yes, It was a wonderful day today!

Saturday, 8th April 1978

The three bitches had tantrums all day today. Why? Yesterday afternoon, right after classes were dismissed, the headmistress called them in her office and hauled them over the coals for three hours, as Mary Tripis complained this morning, still whining. I certainly can't say that I feel sorry for them.

... However, this rare victory of mine will bear serious consequences: Right from the very next day, I become a target for the whole school. Not only my classmates, but also pupils from other classes despise me openly and call me “mollycoddle” or “sneak” all the time. Wherever I am, I can hear torrents of mockeries, catcalls, jeers. The whole school has turned against me because I dared talk to my mother and because the three whores got a blasting from the headmistress (so much of a punishment). What did they expect, really? Put up with their wickedness for ever, without reacting anyhow, finding it even amusing? They are lunatics, all of them!

Thursday, 4th May 1978

This afternoon my mother, my sister and I went to see an oculist in Kolonaki, because all three of us have eye problems. We arrived half an hour too soon, and Alice kept nagging mum because she wanted a toast here and now.

We entered a big cafeteria which, strangely enough, was absolutely empty. As soon as we got in, the waiters started looking at us askance, whispering to each other. Some other people came in, but they didn't sit at the tables;

they went down the stairs next to the bar and disappeared into the basement. Mum walked to the bar and ordered three toasts: one for my sister, one for me and one for her. The bar-woman prepared them quickly, she asked 150 drachmas for them (!), and then she said to mum, in a low voice: "Take your children and get out of here at once!" We got away at the double.

According to the doctor's diagnosis, my mother has presbyopia, and my myopia has risen a little. As about the small brown tumour my sister has in her left eye, thank God it has stopped growing. Fortunately, it is at the side of the eyeball and can't be seen by others.

Sunday, 7th May 1978

Mum, Alice and I took 100 drachmas and walked to the funfair which takes place in Sourmena square (about a kilometre away from our house), on Sunday after Easter. Firstly, we got a lottery ticket and won a toothbrush. Then we went to the mirrors; I had great fun there, because some of them showed me short and fat, just like an ordinary female. A little later, we went to the swinging boats. Whom did I happen to see there? George Franzis, the most handsome man in the world! He looked taller and thinner than last year, dressed in crimson, simply gorgeous! He saw me too, we looked at each other, I thought he would stop and talk to me, but he just kept walking. I didn't dare speak to him. I just glanced at him and kept going...

Sunday, 21st May 1978

This morning I went to Mary's house in Voula and stayed there all day. I can't say I had a bad time, but the truth is that my friend has been acting like a diva lately and this gets on my nerves.

In the evening her uncle and aunt turned up. They have a son at our age. At their presence, Mary became even worse. She was always trying to be clever, she was rude to me or even ignored me completely. At a moment, I disagreed with her about something and she let fly at me:

“I've had enough of you! Go to hell!”

I was dumbfounded at her insolence, but I stood silent and checked in my anger.

“Has she abused you like that before?” her cousin asked me.

“No,” I answered embarrassed.

“That was a good start!”

Later on, it was revealed that Mary's cousin and I attend the same gymnasium but he is in C2 class. I have never noticed him so far and, as he told me, I didn't remind him of anything either.

“That's weird! How come don't you know me? The whole school has been talking about me!” I let slip but then I shut up immediately.

All night long, in my bed, I kept wondering: What's wrong with Mary? Once we used to get along so well. It seems my friend has changed; she is no longer the carefree girl I used to know. Day by day she is becoming a woman, while I obstinately remain a child. Mary likes flirting all men around her, while I don't give a dime. I am still in love with George Franzis. Mary enjoys going to the park and swaying her hips to all the boys there. When I frowned at the whole performance this afternoon, Mary looked at me scornfully and said: “You are a girl, too! You should sway your hips a little!”

Yet, this is impossible for me, maybe because I'm still tall and thin like a rake, not at all in the mood for airs and graces. Female mincing and simpering is just not my cup of tea...

Sunday, 18th May 1978

This time it was Mary's turn to come and stay with me for the weekend. I can't stand her any more. She's become such a smart aleck! She thinks she is the most beautiful and shrewd woman in the world. All she is interested in is throwing herself at any man she meets, including my friend Gregory who is twelve years old now.

During these two days, she was constantly itching to go to the local park and flirt any man she found there; moreover, she kept shouting English or French phrases so as to be heard by everybody. "Don't try so hard, we can speak English too!" a boy pulled her leg yesterday. Then, she was in the sulks and hardly talked to me from Saturday afternoon till Sunday evening, when she left with a long face.

Monday, 19th June 1978

I considered it weird that Mary called me this morning and asked me to visit her at 1:30. "We'll take lunch together, and we'll have a nice time! Bring your sister along, if you like," she said and I agreed, thinking that she wanted to make up for her bad behaviour at the weekend.

So, Alice and I arrived on time, we rang the bell three, four times, but nobody answered the door. We walked around for a quarter or so, into the heat of the summer, then we rang Mary's bell again, still nothing. We repeated the walk, we tried again at 2:05, to no avail. In the end, we took the way back home disappointed and exhausted for nothing.

Later in the afternoon, when I called her on the phone, Mary excused herself that she had to go somewhere for five minutes, right at the time of the appointment. Nonsense. I've been very patient with Mary, but I think enough is enough. I don't like these comings and goings anymore...

Thursday, 22nd June 1978

It was about noon when Mary phoned me and, without dropping the slightest hint about my birthday which was yesterday, she started boasting that she had passed the class with an average of 16. I congratulated her, though I know she barely got a 12. Then, she suggested we meet in the afternoon, but I told her straight out that we had better put an end to our friendship, since we can't communicate any more.

"Why, Yvonne? Why can't we communicate? Did we have a row? What happened?" she sounded sorry.

"We didn't have a regular set-to, but you hardly talked to me during the whole weekend and you always wanted to have the upper hand. You can't bear the slightest objection."

"Nobody likes objections!" she said sharply.

"Anyway, that was it, we are through!" I concluded.

"Shan't we meet again?"

"No. Goodbye, Mary."

"Goodbye..."

Wednesday, 28th June 1978

This is the last day of the entrance examinations to lyceum. I would take an exam in ancient Greek and I had to go to the high school of Argyproupolis, at the back of beyond. I don't know why, but I was confused and got off the bus five or six bus-stops before. As soon as I realized it, I started wandering in the streets in a frantic condition, desperately looking for the huge building. I knocked on many doors answered by drowsy people who had no idea where that high school was. Finally, after a frenzied trek through thorny fields, I found it at last! My relief was indescribable.

I was more than half an hour late, but fortunately the

subjects hadn't been given yet. Helen, who was sitting behind me, wanted me to help her and kept nagging me all the time, just like she had done in all the previous exams. I had no other alternative but literally shout to her "Leave me alone!". The invigilator turned round and gave us a stern look, but she didn't say anything. Phew!

In the end, after all papers had been collected, the pupil sitting in front of me turned and talked to me. It was Helias, a polite boy with blond hair and blue eyes, one of the few good children in my class. He took a deep breath and, without beating around the bush, asked to get off with me; I found him agreeable and nice, yet I was not at all in the mood for such things and I discouraged him immediately. Besides, I found it rather strange that he chose to talk to me today, the last day of the exams. During the whole school year we had never spoken to each other, we didn't even say "hello".

"Shall I give you my photo, so that you will remember me?" he asked sadly.

"I can remember you without it!" I replied flat.

Friday, 30th June 1978

The school year is over, and I feel very happy about it because this was the worst year of my life. The whole school sucked, but especially my class (C4) was a regular bedlam, full of mad rogues who thought they were the eighth wonder of the world. They just couldn't put up with anyone different from them. "They are trumps and if they see a good child, they seek to make his or her life miserable", as the headmistress herself had said to my mother.

I passed the class with an average grade of 17.7, and got into General Lyceum with an average of 85%. Not so bad for someone who was derided by a whole school

incessantly, vulgarly, malevolently. On the other hand, many “geniuses” in my class, popular and sexually experienced, didn't manage to move up. To name just a few: Anna Tsaldaris (a harlot), Dimitri Haribdis (help! A dragon at large!), Peter (a trashy Don Juan), Joanna (a bimbo), Vanda (a sly fox) etc. In all, 14 out of 38 children in my class will have to repeat the class...

* * *

Monday, 10th July 1978

The best and the worst day in my life: The school year has just started and I have to go to that awful high school again. On arriving there for the first time after three carefree months, I hope to meet some of my old schoolmates from the gymnasium of Glyfada. None of them is there, apart from George Franzis! We are looking at each other, we start talking cheerfully, he is gorgeous as always. I feel great, but then something nasty happens: I wake up and my frustration is beyond description...

In the morning I decided to walk to the high school of Glyfada and have a look at the results of the third class. I didn't see George's name anywhere and I was very disappointed. In fact, there is not much left of the unforgettable B4 of last year: Out of 61 children, I saw the names of 30 only -which means that my hopes are lost once and for all.

Wednesday, 12th July 1978

This afternoon my mother and I went to see a local physiotherapist. After he had examined me, he said I would need ten sessions of physiotherapy for my back. He also showed me some exercises to do at home, and I must keep

doing them until I'm eighteen years old.

I'm really bored even at the thought of physical exercise, but at least I will get rid of that horrible orthopedic belt, since the physiotherapist considers it to be completely unsuitable for me:

“The belt immobilizes the body, while such cases of scoliosis require motion! Who prescribed that thing?” he wondered.

As soon as he heard the name of the other doctor, he gave us a meaningful look and said:

“And he sent you to his brother, right?”

Right...

Friday, 21st July 1978

This afternoon my dear sister managed to get on my nerves again: We were both lying in bed, watching TV. Alice was about to eat an apple and I was looking at an interesting poster of a Greek singer, which I bought the other day.

Suddenly, Alice began whining: “I want you to give me this picture, right now!”

“I won't give it to you, it's mine!”

“You are evil! Give it to me!”

“No! Why do you want it, anyway? You don't even like these songs!”

“I want it! I want it now!” she shouted and I refused again.

“I'll show you now!” she roared and hurled the apple at my belly with all her strength.

It hurt a lot, I burst into crying with pain and Alice snatched the paper cover from my hands and tore it to a thousand pieces. There followed a battle royal, I made a strongly-worded protest to mum about my sister's achievements, but she looked at me stern and said: “She's only half your age, you shouldn't pay her any heed” -the

same old tune.

I ran to my room furious; a little later, mum came and told me that Alice was sorry about all that: “She tore your picture by mistake, she didn't mean it, she didn't know what she was doing, don't be so strict to her, try to understand...” “Alright, now leave me alone,” I replied and mum walked out with a long face.

Wednesday, 20th September 1978

This is the last free day for me, after three months of relative insouciance. During August, my family and I spent twenty days of vacations in Spain on my father's ship; nice, amusing holidays which I deserved after a horrible school year. We even had the chance of watching live bullfighting! It was very interesting, yet I was astonished to find out that the whole thing was a foul play. All six bulls were obviously sedated. Especially the first one could hardly walk. The matador's victory is preordained. The bull doesn't have the slightest chance of surviving the successive, coordinated blows of the bullfighters. I don't know why, but I identified myself with the bulls...

Unfortunately, schools are starting again tomorrow. Why do I have to return to that bedlam? I had a wonderful time in the summer, and I'm not at all in the mood for meeting all those rascals again. How shall I face all those hateful persons?

Class A Lyceum

Saturday, 30th September 1978

Thank God, there aren't many of last year's school-mates in my class, now that I am in the first class of lyceum (senior high school). For the time being, I don't think I'll have a problem.

This morning more pupils appeared, some of whom I thought I would never see again: Vanda was the first to turn up. She treated us to lollipops, she told us jokes and we had a laugh. *By the way, isn't she one of those who failed to move up last year?*

A little later, Mary Tripis came to join us. She greeted us in a friendly way and then she asked me smiling:

“Do you remember me?”

“Yes, I remember you,” I replied.

How could I ever forget you?

The nightmare of last year's C4 seems to be only a sad memory now, but I feel I have already been stigmatized somehow. Nadia, a new pupil, came and talked to me right after the bell had rang for the first break. She appears to be a nice, quiet girl. I think we'll get along well. However, when I mentioned that I don't have many friends here, she was taken aback: “Doesn't anyone talk to you?” she asked, almost frightened.

And a really nasty surprise: Only this evening did I find out that as a lyceum pupil I could have enrolled in any school I wished! This means I could have chosen the lyceum of Glyfada but I didn't, because I thought I weren't allowed to. Therefore, I've lost all possibility of seeing George again

-but I guess he won't be attending that lyceum either...

Monday, 2nd October 1978

As soon as I got to school, I looked for my new friend, Nadia. She didn't seem happy to see me. From the very first moment she treated me with frigidity and displeasure. I had to screw every word out of her.

"Shall we join Nina's party?" I suggested finally.

"No, they are having a discussion now!" she said sharply.

I stayed with her until the bell rang and I was bored to death.

I don't intend to run after her any more.

Gregory and his parents were our guests for dinner this evening. I don't know why, but it was impossible for me to fight a certain feeling of isolation. Even Gregory, my childhood friend, kept chatting with Alice about a girl he likes at school. My sister offered to help him by asking her on the phone, pretending she were a classmate of hers.

"This is an old, good trick," she assured Gregory, who smiled happily.

"Hey, Yvonne, you see how clever your sister is?" he told me, giving me a meaningful look.

Aunt Pauline hastened to express her admiration too:

"Alice is a live wire! She will never hesitate over anything!"

"Yes, right!" I said (couldn't bottle it up). "And when we say "anything", we mean anything!"

"No, I didn't mean that," she mumbled embarrassed.

Wednesday, 11th October 1978

In spite of the expected difficulties, I do my best to become more popular at school. I often press myself to join certain parties of girls, trying to look cheerful and sociable. However, as soon as I approach them, they stop talking at once and they go away within a second.

This morning, as soon as I arrived at school, I took a deep breath and decided to join a circle of classmates. I saw them watching me with an enigmatic look, but I kept going. When I got near, I suddenly slipped on something very slippery and fell down flat, before everybody's legs. I heard smothered laughter and whispering, but none of them did anything to help me stand up. Only Vanda spoke to me in an ironic tone: "The bad thing about you is that you are too tall and when you fall down you take up too much space!" Nevertheless, I smiled and stayed in the circle, which broke up within seconds.

Tuesday, 21st November 1978

This year I'm sitting at the second desk together with a new pupil, whose name is Virginia. However, most of the time I sit alone, because Virginia is in the habit of changing desks almost every day. To be more precise, whenever a girl is absent, Virginia goes and takes her place until the other one comes back to school.

"Do you mind if I sit with Nina today?" she asked me this morning.

"No, I don't; I have got used to it!" I answered.

Besides, I can no longer ignore the fact that I am isolated again, despite all my efforts for socialization. The only ones who tolerate my presence are two boring girls, fat Lena and religious Kate: All they do during the breaks, is hide in a corner and say the lesson to each other again and again; I just look at them bored stiff and wish I were in some other, more joyful party of girls.

In the afternoons I usually meet my cousins, Jenny and Niki, who left Cefallonia this summer. Now they live in their house in Glyfada, together with their parents. They have come to live here because Jenny intends to get into the

medical school of the university of Athens. We meet almost every day, we drink tea, we go for long walks, we watch movies at the local cinema, we have a good time. We get along very well, especially with Jenny, with whom we discuss many interesting subjects such as men, marriage, feminism, our future careers etc.

Saturday, 23rd December 1978

There was a Christmas celebration at school today. First we watched a funny theatrical play organized by my class. All the “actors” performed very well, except Alex Tellos who seemed to suffer from stage-fright and his voice could hardly be heard. Then we had a big party. Everyone was dancing except me and Dora, who has lost her father lately. I was feeling very uncomfortable, sticking out like a sore thumb. I wanted so much to dance and have fun like all the other pupils but it was impossible for me; I had a strange impression, as if my whole body was tied up to heavy stones. I wish I had never been in that party...

Thursday, 25th January 1979

As time goes by, mockery and gossip against me are getting worse and worse, though not so evidently as last year. More often than not, I have to endure ostentatious laughs and askance looks. Sometimes I can sense a strong wave of derision in the air, coming mostly from the boys in my class. Especially after the breaks, when we are in class but the master hasn't entered yet, there is always an execrable hubbub of howls and catcalls around me. I usually refuse to admit I am its target, maybe because I feel totally unable to react anyhow. Sometimes I can't even listen clearly to what they say, as if I were deaf.

This morning, though, the low-voiced comments of the girls near me made me more suspicious. All at once, I heard Nadia shouting: "Stop it now! Whenever she is in, you keep howling at the poor girl!"

"Oh, no, we don't!" said Haribdis ironically.

"But... how is it possible that she doesn't understand a thing?" I heard Lena wonder behind me. A little later, she found the opportunity and flung at me: "It seems to me that you are a sleepyhead!"

Thursday, 22nd March 1979

Today we went on a day trip to Delphi. We set off at 9:30 in the morning. I didn't like it at first. How could I? Nobody deigned to talk or sit next to me in the coach. Yet, the journey was wonderful. As soon as we arrived, we visited the museum and the archaeological site. The ancient temple of Apollo is a magical place, full of energy. The landscape of the green mountains surrounding the site is just amazing. I was feeling wonderful, all my sorrows and concerns were gone, my soul was serene. I wished I could stay there for ever.

Unfortunately, we stayed at Delphi only for one hour and then we left for the city of Itea, where we had lunch in a seaside taverna. Alex and Nina fell into the sea, they both got wet and everybody laughed. We had a nice time there, too. After a couple of hours we got on the coach and took the way back home. Quite unexpectedly, Antonia came and sat next to me. "Why should Yvonne be sitting all by herself?" she said to some others who looked at her in wonder.

Soon there was a party in full swing: The cassette player was on full blast and all pupils were clapping their hands to the rhythm of the music. Me too. After a while, I

could feel by hands burning. Taking turns, we rose from our seats and danced to the music. The driver didn't mind at all; on the contrary, he seemed to be having a good time too. The highlight of the evening was when I danced a blues with Alex Tellos. Some pupils also told jokes and funny stories, everybody was happy, it was a cock-up!

We arrived at school at 9:30 in the evening. Many parents were standing outside, waiting for their children. I really had a terrific time today. It was a rare experience for me...

Wednesday, 9th May 1979

I was greatly surprised when Nina Fokas, one of the best pupils in our class, phoned me this afternoon and informed me about the newly established pupils' club, which is not far from our school, and the important meeting of today. I was happy to hear her but I also wondered about her interest in me; we hardly talk at school, we just say "hello".

When we got there, I saw numerous pupils from all three classes of our lyceum gathered in a spacious room. The atmosphere was friendly and positive. We mostly discussed the creation of various activity groups, such as music, dance, painting, cinema etc.

However, I don't know why, but I didn't manage to feel really comfortable with all those people; nor was I interested in any of the suggested activities, although I can play the organ quite well, I can paint portraits and I like cinema too. I can't tell what exactly put me off; maybe the frequent repetition of "there is a lot of work to be done by all members". *Don't we have enough homework already?* In the end, we were asked to raise hands and enter ourselves for any of those groups; I didn't do so, not even once.

"Aren't you interested in any of these activities?" asked

Nina.

“They are all fine, but I'm not good at anything, neither at music, nor at dance; and I seldom go to the cinema,” I replied hastily.

I don't know what happened with that club finally, but I never heard anything about it again...

Thursday, 17th May 1979

This afternoon, my cousin Annita and her mother paid us a visit. After a while, my sister suggested we go to the local park. It sounded like a nice idea and we agreed at once.

No sooner had we arrived and sat on the swings, when a dozen of teenage boys rolled up, some of them on bicycles, and surrounded us in a rather aggressive manner. I don't know what they wanted exactly; they just kept glaring at us, shouting rigmaroles and guffawing like lunatics.

A few minutes later we left the park, very annoyed. However, very soon we realized that we were being dogged by the gang. They kept jeering, wailing, swearing at us continuously, all the way home. They disappeared only when my mother answered the door and we got into the house.

Class B Lyceum

Monday, 15th October 1979

It's been hardly one month since the beginning of the new school year, and the concerted war against me has been clearly escalating: Wherever I am, I hear loud jeers, mocking laughter and malevolent comments. I usually can't understand the words, maybe because I have developed a sort of hysterical deafness. My classmates avoid me as much as possible; they even refuse to sit with me, as if I were a leper. It often happens that four girls sit crammed at one desk, while I sit all alone.

Anyway, the whole situation seems to be a mystery: Even if I were “haughty”, “conservative”, “wayward”, “a mollycoddle” and I don't know what else I'm accused of, would all that hostility against me be really justified? After all, I never annoy anybody; in fact, I hardly speak to anybody. Or am I the only “nerd” in the whole school?

Wednesday, 24th October 1979

As if all the above weren't enough, during the breaks I often see an old acquaintance, who is no other than Vlassis! Apart from some sarcastic looks, I can't say that he bothers me while at school. However, more often than not, I happen to meet him outdoors and he is seldom alone; there is always a group of trumps around him, who all have a common target: me! This means that almost every day I have to confront gangs of bums who deride, jeer, or swear at me in streets, buses, public places, everywhere!

This afternoon, as I was returning from school by bus, I soon got aware of some commotion around me. There were about a dozen boys who were jeering and pointing at me, full of insolence, while the other passengers were looking at me in wonder. I didn't react anyhow; I only pretended nothing was happening.

In the evening, mum and I paid a visit to aunt Pauline. I was astonished when she said that she was in that bus too and that I looked very sad and miserable. "Why that long face, Yvonne? People would think: Who knows what problems the poor girl has!", she commented. I denied having any problems, but I wondered: First of all, why didn't I notice her at all? And how is it possible that she didn't get wind of what was happening in the bus?

Friday, 9th November 1979

With a view of the National Pan-Hellenic Examinations, since the beginning of this month I have been attending a local tutorial school called "Cyclotron". I spend three hours every evening there, which really tires me a lot. I have tuition in maths, physics and chemistry, since I have chosen to study exact sciences -although my marks are more suitable for classical studies, as a mistress told my mother.

The problem is that I have to study extra for the tuition centre; therefore, I don't have enough time for my regular homework. Moreover, I don't feel comfortable with the other pupils. During the breaks I usually stand alone in the balcony, waiting for someone to talk to me; I have tried to approach them a few times but it felt too difficult -maybe because their common disgust against me is getting more and more obvious day by day...

Thursday, 15th November 1979

No matter how hard I've tried to ignore it, a new incubus has come for me inside the rooms of "Cyclotron": Without my provoking it anyhow, certain pupils have it in for me. They constantly glare, swear or jeer at me with abnormal persistence, often carrying away the others. The fact is that the whole class has now turned against me. During the lessons there is a continuous, derisive hubbub of jarring giggles, hateful insults, vulgar mockeries, all of which target me and nobody else.

As a result, I sit all alone at one of those two-metre-long desks, while the rest of the pupils sit crammed, four or five together at one desk. Every time I raise my hand to answer a question, the whole class bursts into mad laughter, as if they were keyed up. It is weird though, that the masters are never annoyed by all this fuss and they never make the slightest remark to the trouble makers.

This evening a new boy came and sat next to me. He didn't stay long: Probably because I didn't speak to him with the required feminine, mincing manner, he sprang up from his seat and squashed himself together with four other boys at the front desk, saying: "Make some room for me, because she is in a bad mood!" There followed a torrent of wolfish roars and guffaws.

Thursday, 6th December 1979

This evening it was impossible for me to pay any attention to the lessons in "Cyclotron". There was a incessant, resonant farrago of mocking giggles, jeers and catcalls all around me. Suddenly, everybody burst into loud laughter. Instinctively looking up, I saw an open palm rising over my head, while the whole class was resounding with crazy laughter. The hand belonged to Dimitri Mavros, who

sits right behind me. He is an ugly, skinny gipsy with black frizzy hair, dark skin and goggled eyes, and he is always the ringleader of the fuss. “What are you doing? Are you crazy?” I told him angrily. He crouched back and chuckled ironically. The rest of the class took a quarter to calm down. The teaching master didn't react anyhow, as if he were absent.

Wednesday, 9th January 1980

That was un hoped-for, but my mother finally agreed to my dropping out of the tutorial school since it offers me nothing, as I explained to her. I had been thinking about telling her so for two weeks, but I hesitated because I feared she might repeat “Don't pay any heed to those who mock you; just pay attention to the lessons, that's why you go there” -like she told me the other day, when I first tried to talk to her about my problems in “Cyclotron”. Anyway, this afternoon I finally persuaded her to phone and inform them that I won't continue my tuition there. My relief was beyond description.

Sunday, 10th February 1980

This evening my family and I visited the renowned Monastery of Saint Irene in Lykovrisi. Then we decided to call on uncle Sebastian, who's my father's second cousin and he lives nearby. Fortunately, all three of his sons were at home and it proved to be a very positive experience, just like their visit to us three years ago.

Indeed, I wonder: Why do I feel so spontaneously free and comfortable when I am in the company of these cousins, and not at all “reserved”, “nervous” or “boring”, as usual? Maybe because they don't treat me as if I were that...

And a strange coincidence: The second son has an organ exactly similar to mine (make and model). The eldest has a piano and he played a classical piece for us. He performed very well, and we all amazed at his skill.

A little later my cousins, Alice and I went for a walk in the park. I was greatly surprised when I found out that the pianist was not only unimpressed by my sister's sex-related ribaldry, but exasperated as well. He is probably the only person I have ever met who wasn't fascinated by my sister's mincing manners! I explained to him that adolescents of today get crazy when they hear the word "love", I humoured him a little and he calmed down.

... I hope to meet those cousins soon, and keep our nice friendship alive. *However, I will never see them again...*

Tuesday, 1st April 1980

This afternoon my mother and I paid a visit to aunt Pauline. Gregory was there too. He is in the third class of gymnasium now. We don't play in the streets any more, but our relationship has improved a lot. Anyway, I was astonished to see that Gregory got the second trimester report with an average grade of 17. I found that rather strange, since in the first trimester he had an average of 14, as usual. I don't know how to explain this mystery, but I've heard his parents have recently joined some political club.

... Next trimester Gregory's average grade will fall back to 14. Why indeed? Did anything go wrong with the club?

* * *

Saturday, 14th July 1980

This evening Mrs Lucy, my mother and I went to the local cinema. There was an adventure film on. As soon as

we sat on the white fabric chairs, I heard a mocking voice calling my name, amongst hundreds of spectators. Turning my head back, I saw Vlassis and some of his underlings, who were sitting three rows behind me. I tried to ignore them but the trumps kept on jeering at me and I could no longer contain myself. I turned back again, showed them both my open palms and shouted: "Here, that's for you!"

Three seconds later Vlassis was standing in the aisle next to me, his face red as never before, pretending to be unfairly offended.

"Did you show your palms at me?" he asked with a solemn face.

"Yes, I did!" I replied sharply.

He asked the reason why, there were mutual protests, complaints and confusion.

"Why do you make fun of Yvonne?" intervened my mother.

"Yvonne never bothers anybody, why do you and your friends make fun of her all the time?"

"I don't make fun of her! There are some guys, who mock her..."

"You tell them to mock me!" I popped up in a fluster.

"Don't you go to school, young man?" mum asked then.

"I am a sailor!"

Really? That's why we've missed you for a few happy months?

At that point we dropped the subject, Vlassis returned to his seat, and mum hastened to scold me: "You shouldn't have done that! By showing your open palms at him, you let everybody in the cinema know who Yvonne is!"

"If I had let the rascals jeering at me during the whole film, wouldn't the others have seen who I am?" I retorted.

"Let's hope that Lucy didn't get wind of that!" sighed my mother.

Friday, 25th July 1980

I passed the class with an average grade of 16,5 -just like last year. Not much of a success. I didn't do so well in the Pan-Hellenic Exams either: Composition 12.5, Maths 11.5, Physics 14, Chemistry 16.5.

I had studied everything perfectly for the maths exam, apart from a note which contained an insignificant mathematical formula; during the school year, we had not dealt with it at all. Yet, one of the two problems given in the exam could be solved only with that formula! I did not panic, I used my brains and managed to find the answer by applying practical arithmetic.

Eventually, however, the master who corrected my paper was not moved by my effort and gave me a 11.5...

Wednesday, 31st December 1980

We had some very bad news today, which really spoilt New Year's Eve: Uncle Jerry, my mother's brother, died of heart attack at the age of 52 this afternoon. His unexpected death shocked us all.

Uncle Jerry was an interesting person: He used to visit us often, he brought us chocolate cakes and talked about many philosophical subjects. Since he had no family of his own, my mother had to spend the last day of the year arranging the funeral. My sister and I stayed at home together with aunt Pauline. Detail: A big flower pot disappeared from our yard three days ago; mum regarded the fact as a bad omen.

... The very next day, Mrs Lemony will come to offer her condolences, pretending to be devastated for the loss of a man she hardly knew -since she hasn't spoken to us for years...

Class C Lyceum

Friday, 6th March 1981

The third and last class of lyceum has almost finished but nothing has changed for me: While at school, I constantly have to put up with the same old gossip and jeers, the same hostility from everybody, the same boring duet of friends during the breaks. Moreover, it's been about a week now that my classmates have been avoiding me even more: They all make sure that they sit as far as possible from me, and they complain about a terrible smell in the classroom. This makes me wonder, because I haven't smelt anything bad so far.

Seeing that Nina was sitting alone at her desk this morning, I made so bold as to go and sit with her. "Welcome," she said in a flat voice. During the lesson of literature, there were groans of disgust echoing all over the class, probably because of the mysterious stench that only I can't smell.

As soon as the lesson finished and the bell rang, Nina sprang up, took her things and went to sit at another desk, where three other girls were crammed. "She is terrible!" I heard her say to them and only then did I realize that I am the cause of the whole problem! According to various hints I happened to overhear later, the smell is due to silent yet stinky farts which I let out continuously but, strangely enough, I can't feel them at all! How can this be possible?

Friday, 27th March 1981

I've had the same problem for a month now and I

don't know what to do. I still wonder: *How is this possible?* Every day, for six or seven hours that I am at school, the whole classroom resounds with groans of disgust and everybody complains about the awful smell! They never stop! This morning, during the fourth break, as soon as I dared approach a circle of classmates, one of them turned towards me and asked sniffing: "Who let it out?". I got away hastily, as if admitting my guilt.

Saturday, 11th April 1981

I still go to the local playground from time to time; I just sit on a swing and watch the children play; it relaxes me a lot and makes me forget my troubles. This afternoon, little Nicolas approached and stared at me for a few moments, with an ironic smile on his face. He is an impudent, mischievous six-year-old boy, who is always swearing and pestering everybody in the park. His mother never makes the slightest remark to him, she just looks at him admiringly. Maybe that's why he has become such a handful.

I didn't even have the time to realize why, but the little monster started calling me names with his shrieking voice:

"You, tall camel, you are so ugly!"

"Shut your mouth, now!" I scolded him.

"You have a man's voice, too! You are a man! A man!" he mocked.

"You are a nasty little boy, you know that?"

"Shut up, you fart! You fart all the time and the whole room stinks!"

He repeated the last sentence over and over again, full of malice, while I was wondering flabbergasted: Does he really know what he is talking about? Has he heard about me, maybe? But from whom? Too many mysteries around me lately...

Friday, 8th May 1981

I don't care about the problem of the "stench" any more. As far as I can see, there is nothing I can do about it. I have told my mother about it but she says it's only a fixed idea and that I should forget all about it.

In the meanwhile, pupils of other classes have started to talk about me: "What stinks?" I heard an unknown girl ask her friends on the road this morning, as we were all heading for school. "You know what it is!" another one answered meaningfully and they all giggled. I wasn't even close to them.

It's weird though, that such things happen only when I am in the school premises. Nothing like this happens when I am at the English tuition centre, or at home, or anywhere else. Indeed, how is it possible that someone "lets them out" non-stop for seven hours every day, without ever realizing it?

Thursday, 6th August 1981

I took the lyceum certificate with an average grade of 16.7; as about, this year's Pan-Hellenic Examinations, I didn't do so well: Composition 14, Maths 11, Physics 16.5, Chemistry 16.5. As expected, with such marks I didn't manage to get into university and I am uneasy in my mind about the future.

School belongs to the past now, unlike my reputation. As it seems, I won't get rid of it so easily: Whenever I am in streets or in public places, I often have to put up with jeers, catcalls, mocking laughter, ostentatious spits down -as usual. I don't dare pass groups of youngsters on the road because they will surely make fun of me: "What an ugly camel you are!" ... "Help! A scarecrow walking!" ... "We like women,

not garbage!” -I heard this morning. Paradoxically, thought, such incidents happen to me only in the area where I live, in Glyfada; nowhere else.

* * *

Tuesday, 18th August 1981

Since yesterday evening my family and I have been in a hotel in Suez, Egypt, together with some other women whose husbands work with my father, on the merchant ship “Apollo”. It's incredibly hot here. We could hardly walk around just for ten minutes this morning, since it was impossible for us to bear the extreme heat and all that dust in the air.

At one o'clock we had lunch in the restaurant of the hotel. Mum told the waiter that she wanted to eat a “chicken soup” and everybody laughed. When the food came, my sister told the waiter that she didn't want any grated cheese, but he didn't understand and he spread a little cheese on her spaghetti; Alice stood up immediately and walked away crying. What a vamp...

It was late in the afternoon when the agent came at last. When we finally got aboard the “Apollo”, everybody was happy because women and children could finally meet their husbands and fathers after many months of separation.

No sooner had we entered my father's cabin, when mum was astounded to see Alice kissing a handsome dark-skinned steward in the corridor. She didn't mention anything to dad, of course. The young man comes from Pakistan and his name is Sayed.

Late at night, my sister, two other children and I gathered in the cook's cabin and watched an interesting adventure movie, which had no subtitles. I was impressed,

because it was the first time in my life that I had watched a film in a video player.

Saturday, 22nd August 1981

We are on roadstead outside the harbour of Latakia, in Syria. Dad spends his time playing backgammon with Jimmy, the marine engineer, and he always loses. They both shout, sing and joke all day. Nick, the wireless operator, happens to be a dwarf and Jimmy is always after him: He calls him “nephew”, he plays tricks on him or grabs him and turns him upside down. Marina, the engineer's four-year-old daughter, is very fond of me and she follows me wherever I go. I have a really nice time here, on the ship.

This evening all Greek seamen and their families had dinner on the deck. We roasted a lamb, we drank wine, we told jokes and we had some laughs. Michael, a nice Pakistani steward took us lots of photographs.

Thursday, 27th August 1981

At noon we entered the harbour of Latakia at last. In the afternoon we went out, to the city. Syria proves to be a modern country with lots of shops. Half of the native women wear traditional long dresses and kerchiefs on their heads. The other half wear blue jeans and T-shirts, and they don't hide their hair. We enjoyed shopping for hours, we bought colourful traditional clothes and fine jewels: a gold bracelet for me and a gold watch for Alice.

Later, in the evening, we all went to an outdoor restaurant. There was a big group of Arabs sitting at the next table. Their wives were wearing heavy, dark-coloured coats, despite the terrible heat of the summer. However, when they undid some buttons, we saw that the heavy coats covered expensive silk gowns and sparkling jewels.

Sunday, 30th August 1981

This evening some of the sailors decided to go out. We were casually watching them from the deck, when my fourteen-year-old sister suddenly sprang up, rushed out to the dock, and ran to catch up with Luigi, the third engineer. The guy is handsome, but he is 37 years old and married with seven children. Dad frowned in disappointment. "It seems that your daughter is used to chasing men!" he said to mum.

At night we were invited to dinner by Alonzo, a Syrian steward. I was impressed at the luxury of his house and the good manners of his family. Alonzo, who is a Muslim, proves to be a quite progressive man: Not only does he let his wife go out without a kerchief, but he also allows her to work as a teacher. He helps her with the housework too. There were lots of Syrian traditional dishes on the table and I liked most of them. I had pilaff with dried fruit, stuffed vine leaves and yogurt sauce.

Tuesday, 15th September 1981

Early in the afternoon, the Asian sailors made trouble because nobody came to serve them lunch, as they complained. They smashed up everything in their dining room and then they all returned to their cabins, refusing to work. It was Sayed who had started the mutiny. Michael was carried away by the others. Luigi was scared and hid in the engine room. The chief steward and the cook didn't turn up at all, because they both had a terrible back ache, as they said. The truth is that the sailors caused all this trouble because they know that most of them will be fired as soon as we arrive in Belgium.

Thursday, 17th September 1981

This morning we arrived in Antwerp, Belgium, after fifteen days of dull voyage. All women and children went for a walk in the beautiful city. Most of the buildings are old but well-preserved, the streets are covered by flat cobbles and the people are good looking and well dressed. The weather is always rainy or cloudy, but it's not very cold.

We finally got into a huge department store, we shopped in all of its seven floors and when we finished, we had ice creams in the restaurant of the eighth floor. There aren't so big and luxurious department stores in Greece.

Later, in the afternoon, Mr Kranas, the ship owner, came into my father's cabin. He had just arrived from Greece and wanted to know everything about the mutiny. He seemed polite, calm and composed. He sent for Sayed, who came immediately. The young man was asked to apologize, which he did reluctantly.

“The ship owner never loses!” said Mr Kranas finally.

“Yes, but socialism is gaining ground,” retorted Sayed with a timid smile.

... We shall spend two more carefree days in Antwerp, going for long walks in the cobbled streets, shopping in the same department store, visiting the immense zoo and the aquarium, having a good time in night clubs with Greek music. On Sunday we shall return to Athens by air. This is not only the end of a nice trip, but the end of “the happiest days of my life” as well...

Daydreaming

I really needed to rest for a while and forget my bleak past, so I decided to keep a low profile this year. All I have been doing ever since I finished lyceum, is go to an English tutorial school and study for the Proficiency Certificate. I have also studied maths by myself, at home, with the aim of repeating the Pan-Hellenic Examination. Maybe I should have attended one of those big tuition centres in Athens, but the negative experiences from “Cyclotron” deterred me from that.

Anyway, when the day of the maths examination arrived, as soon as I got out of the house I noticed that Tweety, our canary, was not in his cage. We had left him out all night, his cage hanging next to the front door, and obviously someone found the opportunity to steal him during the night. My mother frowned and considered it to be a bad omen; I don't believe in superstitions but I was sorry about the loss of the bird.

... The exam proved to be a catastrophe: Although I had studied very well, the subjects seemed entirely incomprehensible to me. In the end, I got a 01.5, the lowest mark in my entire school life.

Sunday, 16th January 1983

Since September I have been attending a secretarial school as well as an Italian tuition centre in Athens. It is my intention to leave for Italy and study Astronomy, which has always been my greatest dream. The decision about studies abroad was taken after an idea given to us by George, a

good cousin of mine, who has always believed in me: “Yvonne must become a scientist! She shouldn't be interested in anything less!” he said, as soon as we told him about the secretarial school.

In both the Italian and the English tuition centres, I am “one of the best students, if not the best”, as my teachers say. Moreover, I never have any problems of socialization there. Nobody makes fun of me there; on the contrary, all my classmates are fond of me and acknowledge my due.

As about my future carrier, my parents' opinion remains the same ever since I was an infant: When I get married I must stop working. Yet, a university degree will always be useful to me because I will be able to show it off to my husband any time we quarrel. I used to agree to that idea till recently, but now I wonder: Why should I spend five years of my life studying hard, only to become a housewife? If I take a university degree, I had better use it.

Saturday, 5th February 1983

Despite my relative popularity at the tutorial schools of English and Italian, my social life is getting poorer and poorer: Cousin Jenny has recently returned to Cefallonia, where she works in a bank. As about Niki, I've never got along so well with her. I don't have any other friends, so I usually attach myself to Alice's circle: When one or more of her numerous friends come over, I hasten to join them even if they make a wry face.

As about boys, they never approach me unless they really have to! In all probability they are repelled by my excessive shyness, as well as by my still child-like body: I am 1.77 m tall, I weigh 48 kilos, I have flat breasts and the opposite of a wasp waist. Besides, all relatives and neighbours still admire Alice because “she is very femini-

ne”, “as sharp as a needle”, “such a lively girl”, while I am “conservative”, “blunt” and “boring”, as they say.

This morning Helen, who is Alice's best friend and notorious for her loose morals, paid us a visit. We soon started a heated discussion regarding my sister's liveliness in contrast to my reserve: “Psychologists say that lively children are normal, whereas quiet children are not!” said Helen, with an air of expertise.

Yet, I wonder: What does it mean to be “lively”? Judging by what I see around me, to be “lively” means always go with the flow: Is swearing in fashion? “Lively” people swear more than anyone else. Is mini skirt in fashion? “Lively” girls wear the shortest one. Is drinking alcohol in fashion? The “lively” get stinking drunk every night, and so forth. On the other side, all these “lively” girls turn pale when they hear that I intend to leave my family and go to Italy for studies. They intend to have fun till they are twenty and then get married, have children and live on the memories of their youth (how original!). All things considered, “lively” people are nothing but the most obedient pawns of the system...

Thursday, 24th March 1983

Something very odd happened this evening: While I was in the kitchen making sandwiches, Alice and Helen were in the living room. They were having a hot argument about extraterrestrials and flying saucers -which I found strange, since the two of them had never shown any interest in such things before. They always talk about fashion, boys and dates. All of a sudden, both girls came running to me and they both looked very upset.

“It's incredible, you will never imagine what's just happened, Yvonne!” started Alice, in a quivering voice.

“What... what happened?” I got curious.

“We were talking about UFOs and aliens, whether these things really exist or not, and you know what?” went on Alice.

“We saw a flying saucer right outside the window!” exclaimed Helen, in obvious bewilderment.

“It was flying a little higher than the electric current wires, right opposite our house! Can you believe it?” added my sister, still quivering.

“Of course I can't believe that,” I replied smiling. “You probably imagined the whole thing because you were having a relative conversation!”

“No, we really saw that, we both saw that!” protested Helen.

“Yeah, and the UFO came right outside your window, to say “hello”! Come on girls!”

I certainly can't take this story at its face value; In all probability, the two of them imagined the flying object because they were immersed in their discussion; sometimes, the mind plays strange tricks. Or, maybe, they made up the whole tale because they wanted to pull my leg. On the other hand, it's not at all like them to talk about such things or make up such stories...

Monday, 16th May 1983

My sister has been in big trouble lately: A few days ago she had a date with her boyfriend, a certain Mr Antony Markakis, and dad happened to pass by and see them. He has been outraged ever since, reprimanding Alice again and again because “she has dishonoured our family” and “woe is us if rumour spreads, what will people say?”. Moreover, he insists on meeting the bloke, “...so that if anyone comes and tells me he's seen Alice with a boyfriend, I will be able to retort that I have already met him!”.

Anyway, Alice was finally forced to speak to Antony about our father's demands and, strangely enough, the young man did not at all object to meeting him in a café this afternoon. When dad returned home in the evening, he looked calm and satisfied. Obviously, the would-be groom made a very good impression on my father, who finally assured him: "Our meeting means no commitment for you!" Too much ado for nothing, I think.

Wednesday, 15th June 1983

Here is the continuation of the love story: My mother has been itching to meet Antony's parents who, as far as we know, have separated lately although they have five children. "Besides, it's urgent that we find out this guy's intentions regarding your sister!", announced mum this morning. Then she asked me to accompany her to Antony's house, which is not far from ours.

As soon as we saw the old hut with the weedy garden, we were speechless but not daunted. Mum rang the bell and a fat disagreeable lady answered the door. Fortunately, that was not Antony's mother, but an aunt of his. "Mrs Markakis cannot see you now, she has visitors," she told us scornfully. There were many other relatives inside the almost dilapidated house -probably a family reunion. Finally, Antony's mother appeared at the threshold; she looked friendly, we exchanged a few words and she promised to come and visit us as soon as possible.

Friday, 5th August 1983

Antony's parents are about to take a divorce: His mother lives with her boyfriend, his father lives with his girlfriend, and the old house has been abandoned. I am not sure where their five children live. Antony, who is the eldest,

had rented a house nearby; yet he stayed there just for one month, since it proved to be more expensive than he had initially expected. Finally, my sister coerced my parents into allowing Antony to move in with us -under the condition that nothing “irreparable” happens.

It's been three weeks now ever since Antony came to live with Alice on the second floor. My sister is on cloud nine, the two of them do nothing but make out and kiss passionately all day long. I have to admit that the guy is very handsome; that's why Alice finally chose him over hundreds of guys who had been flirting her: He is only 18 years old, he has a muscular body, blond hair and blue eyes. For the last three years he has been working in a carpenter's workshop and he is very efficient at his job. He is not educated, he has finished only elementary school, but he has a pleasant, gregarious character. On the other hand, sometimes he gets irritable and violent; he beats up Alice over a trifle and she does everything she can to hide it. Anyway, it usually doesn't take them long to make it up and start necking again.

This evening, the couple and I went to the local cinema, where we watched a dull comedy. On our way home, not even for one moment did the two of them stop giggling, kissing, cuddling, chasing each other, in a rather ostentatious manner, I'd say.

Then, Antony grabbed Alice with his strong hands, turned her upside down and started revolving her body around his playfully, making sure to catch her just on time before she crashed her head on the pavement. I found the game silly, but Alice kept laughing, apparently enjoying it.

Surely, I have seen couples making out many times, but I have the impression that the two of them were showing off too much. I also found it strange, especially after their

big row of yesterday: The macho man beat up the vamp again, she cried and cried for hours, neither remembers the reason, and I suspect Alice actually likes all this. In all probability, she regards physical assault as proof of passion -just like most women do...

Tuesday, 30th August 1983

As the time for my departure is coming closer and closer, I gain more and more self-confidence. Ambition is flaring up inside me and I like it: I already envisage myself working in the Observatory as an astronomer, making great discoveries, reaching the highest levels of scientific achievement. Apart from that, I also aspire to become a writer of science fiction books and I have already started writing my first novel, entitled "The Conspiracy of Shadows". I won't calm down, unless I fulfill my dreams!

Nevertheless, first I have to get rid of all the inner bondage I have been burdened with since my early childhood: Timidness, self-pity, passivity, pessimism. Surely, a part of the fault lies with me: I have always appeared different from the others, I have never followed the herd. This is unforgivable in the society of humans: You are never accepted as an individual, with your own peculiarities; all you can do is always adjust yourself to the mass, never showing the slightest deviation.

Therefore, from now on I must pretend I am exactly like them: I must behave in the same way as they do, and tell them stories that my life is not at all different from theirs. In general, I must say to people only what they want to hear. In this way, I won't arouse any suspicions about my difference, they will let me be and I will be more focused on my goals.

However, certain difficulties have already appeared: I have considered it right not to apply for Astronomy, which I really wanted, because there are only two available positions for foreign students in all Italian universities. If I had applied for that faculty, there would be great risk of my not being admitted at all. Therefore, I have chosen to start my studies with Industrial Chemistry in the university of Padova; next year I will have the right to enroll in Astronomy.

Anyway, the fat is in the fire now. I'm leaving for Italy in a week. I feel a little anxious but I'm optimistic about the future. I believe that everything will be fine from now on...

Phase Three: Circumspection

Monday, 5th September 1983

My dream of superior studies in Astronomy began early this morning, when my mother and I set out for Italy. It was late in the afternoon when we finally arrived in Padova. Before long my optimism started to wane: We literally scoured the whole city in a taxi, but it just proved to be impossible for us to find a vacant room in a hotel. After two hours of vain search, the taxi driver was so disappointed that he turned off the tariff counter. For some mysterious reason, all receptionists refused to accommodate us for more than two days. In the end, we managed to find a room in a shabby-looking hotel, after a three-hour ride. The kind hotel owner was the only one who agreed to let us stay for a week...

Friday, 16th September 1983

It was about time! I have just managed to find more permanent accommodation in the hotel “Mariposa”. My room is nice and comfortable, however the window overlooks an avenue that's full of traffic, cafeterias and shops. The road is very noisy all day long, till 2:00 o'clock after midnight; the hustle and bustle starts again at 5:00, before sunrise. Moreover, the hotel is rather expensive, which means I have to find lodgings in a house as soon as possible, like most foreign students do.

In the meantime, I have been facing too many difficulties with bureaucracy, as public services either refuse

to help (especially me), or fail to give me the correct explanations, or entangle me in unnecessary procedures.

There is another problem too: As far as I've been informed, the lessons will begin on the 7th of November. Therefore, I consider it wiser and cheaper to return to Greece and stay at home for two weeks, until the school year begins. Fortunately, the hotel owner has agreed to keep my stuff in a store-room until I come back.

Friday, 18th November 1983

I have been attending the University of Padova for ten days now, and I have learned some perturbing things: a) The faculty of Industrial Chemistry in Padova is regarded as the third most difficult in Italy, b) Actually, the lessons started two weeks earlier than I thought, which means that I've missed the first two weeks because no one of those "in charge" could inform me correctly when the school year would begin.

At least, I have found a place to live: It is a spacious, comfortable apartment in the suburb of Arcella, not far from the railway station. After two months of unavailing efforts to find permanent lodgings, this apartment seemed to be godsent, despite the high rent (230.000 lire, a monthly salary) and the fact that I share it with an Italian co-tenant: it's the 25-year-old Silvana, who works as a chambermaid in a hotel. So far, so good: Silvana seems to be an agreeable person, and I also get along well with Daniela, the middle-aged owner of the house.

This morning, however, as Daniela was leaving, she told me smiling: "This jumper stinks! You must wash it!" I was taken aback, but I didn't bear any objection because I didn't want to upset her. Besides, I thought she might have been right...

Monday, 12th December 1983

Day by day I'm losing my patience: The two bitches, the house owner (who comes round almost every day for a quick inspection) and the co-tenant, are always giving me a rough time. They keep complaining that I don't take baths, that I stink of filth, that I don't do any household chores; all this is nothing but lies, of course. On the other hand, I never contradict them, I always try to satisfy their demands, I do whatever they ask me to, I show adaptability and friendliness. Yet, no matter how hard I try, the two of them are never satisfied.

Moreover, there is no key to my room, which means that whenever I am absent, the two bitches can enter freely and tamper with my things. It was the second time this afternoon that I discovered there was a banknote of 50.000 lire missing from my handbag. I didn't say anything, because I had no proof that they had stolen it.

Friday, 16th December 1983

I had just returned from university and I was about to watch my favourite science fiction series on TV, when Silvana came from work. She strutted into the living room, changed the channel quickly, walked out with hasty steps and disappeared into the kitchen. I changed the channel again and turned down the volume. However, the slut rushed into the room again, stood in front of me and asked with an air of importance: "Why did you change that?"

"You want to watch something else?" I wondered.

"Yes, I do!"

"Then, choose the channel you want!" I told her as calm as possible and I got out.

I don't intend to sit in the living room ever again.

Monday, 23rd January 1984

Unfortunately, Christmas vacations are over. This evening I returned to Italy, after eighteen days of calmness with my family. As soon as I entered my room in Arcella, I was astounded to see that all my towels were spread on the radiator, dried out by the heat! I rushed and picked them up at once.

It is not at all hard to understand what has happened; nevertheless, I can't say a word because Silvana would claim that it was I who left the towels on the radiator before leaving for Greece two weeks ago. If that was the case, the whole house would have been burnt down by now...

Wednesday, 18th January 1984

Ever since I returned to Italy, Silvana and Daniela have escalated the war against me: Almost every day I have to put up with insults such as "What's that smell! You stink! Go away!" or "You don't take baths, you are filthy!". Sometimes the two of them talk in a low voice, yet making sure that I can listen: "She doesn't understand a thing! She is a stupid cow!" or "How shall we get rid of that nitwit?"

In the meantime, I have been desperately looking for another house but, unfortunately, so far I haven't managed to find another place to stay -not even a hen coop! In general, landlords avoid letting out rooms to foreign students. Besides, according to hearsay evidence, there seems to be an invariable tactic of Italian house owners: They make their tenants' life miserable, so as to get rid of them in three or four months, finally keeping the two or three rents paid in advance. That's a rattling good trade! As Silvana informed me this afternoon, five different girls, one after the other, had rented my room the previous year!

After four months of meeting cunning landladies who often seek to rip me off without even letting out a room, a certain suspicion has started to haunt my thoughts: People around me are not at all what they seem to be. Behind the smiling mask of the average, well-dressed and polite citizen, hides a criminal mobster, who's able to stab you in the back in order to steal 10.000 lire from your pocket.

Strangely enough, however, all the other foreign students finally manage to find lodgings somewhere, one way or another. Only I can't find anything after so many months of continuous search. Instead of studying, I spend most of my time vainly looking for another house and I can't concentrate on my studies -and universities here are very demanding, they are no joke, as they are in Greece.

Consequently, I will fail in all the examinations of the first semester...

Friday, 27th January 1984

This morning, as I was reading the classified ads in the newspaper hoping to find another room to rent, I saw something that looked like a unique opportunity: "For sale: Bedroom in perfect condition, Milan. Price: 210.000 lire. Phone no ...". I was thrilled, I made a phone call at once and arranged to go and see the room in the afternoon.

I took the bus to Milan and then I had to walk about three kilometres along a deserted road outside the city limits, until I finally found the isolated villa with the tiled roof. Yet, I was not daunted; *such a nice house is worth a little fatigue*, I thought.

When the polite owners of the villa explained to me that the furniture was included in the price, I could hardly believe how lucky I was. Then, all of a sudden, it occurred to me that *only* the furniture was for sale, not the room! I

dropped from the clouds at once.

In the end, the man of the house kindly offered to give me a lift all the way to Padova. During the hour-long journey I stayed taciturn, sadly pondering over my unbelievable blunder again and again: How could I get it all so wrong? How could I ever imagine that somebody would ever sell a room in their house? This is paranoiac! Probably, the dire straits I've been in lately, have affected my judgement. This is the only logical explanation for my unprecedented inanity...

Thursday, 2nd February 1984

I was studying for the maths examination, when suddenly Silvana rushed into my room furious:

“Listen, Yvonne, I've just seen my doctor, and he says I have contracted scabies, and this happened because I come in contact with a dirty person who doesn't wash! And this person is you, Yvonne!”

“What?” I shouted, hardly realizing what she was talking about.

“If I have this disease, you have it too! You should go to a doctor at once! And if you don't leave the house within three days, I will evict you!” she snorted maliciously and walked out with quick steps.

I went on studying for a few moments, but then I quit. It was just impossible for me to go on. Right after, a tremendous storm broke out in my mind. All of a sudden, my world was falling apart. Silvana was threatening with eviction and lawyers, while I was feeling helpless and miserable. I even started wondering whether that harlot could be right: Indeed, I've been smelling something bad around me lately, and this strange stink seems to be coming from my body; it never goes away, not even when I have a

bath. Especially now, after Silvana's offense, the stench has become even more unbearable. *Maybe I am really sick, maybe I do have scabies*, I thought, full of anguish.

Next moment I stood up and got out of the house in a state of frenzy; I walked in the streets for many hours, soliloquizing continuously like a madwoman, until I reached a hospital. I got in and asked to be given medical tests, so as to find out if I actually had the disease mentioned by Silvana. I narrated the whole story to the doctors, they got the drift of it at once and they were sincere enough to explain that in such cases what is needed is a lawyer, not a doctor. Only then did the idea of my being seriously ill start to fade away...

Friday, 3rd February 1984

However, the terrible stench given off by my body seems to be getting worse and worse every moment. At the same time, I feel like drowning in a cascade of negative thoughts and an irresistible desire for revenge; yet, I'm not at all sure about what to do next. The fact is that all this endless suffering, the merciless war I have been at ever since I set foot in Italy, the excessive expenses, the vain exhaustion, are just not worth the while.

After hours of thinking it over and over again, I finally realized that the best thing to do is quit my studies and return to Greece. I phoned my parents right away, I explained everything, crying continuously for 40 minutes, and announced my final decision. They showed enough understanding and reassured me I had made the right choice.

In the afternoon I went to the police and denounced the two bitches (Silvana and Daniela) as impostors. I explained everything to the policemen, I told them about all the intrigues the two sluts had set up against me and other

girls, and I also reported that the landlady had never given me a receipt for the monthly rent. The police officers were interested in my case, they wrote down everything I said and I felt a lot better. There is no other reason for me to stay in Italy any longer...

Saturday, 4th February 1984

So here I am, on the train to Venice, early in the morning, leaving Padova behind for ever. I am also leaving behind my dream of studying Astronomy and living a more interesting and meaningful life.

The truth is that, in spite of the incredible adversities, I experienced a different quality of life during those months I spent in Italy: Strangely enough, I managed to make many friends there, as I was spontaneously sociable and open to everybody, including men. It was pleasant, natural and easy for me to go for a walk with a boy. Men didn't avoid me and I didn't run away from them. Even time seemed to be passing more slowly, more naturally. During these months, it was as if I were a different person, in a different universe.

Yet, the miracle was not meant to last. Now it is all over and I am here now, on the train to Venice; soon I'll be on the plane to Greece. I am leaving now, actually forced out of that different universe, while my old self is calling me back with an omnipotent, malignant attraction. I feel extremely disappointed and I can't stand the stench my own body gives off. I must be very sick, I have to see a doctor, the sooner the better...

As the train is accelerating on the rails, I feel more and more desperate. An endless blackness is flooding my soul. I know well that when I return home, I will become what I once was: isolated, disagreeable, a misfit, a loser. I hope to avoid the return to my old miserable self, but deep

inside I know this is out of the question.

... As soon as I arrive home in the evening, the first thing I do is ask my mother whether she can smell anything nasty on me. She is taken aback at my question and she tells me that, on the contrary, I smell wonderful! Next moment the stench will vanish into thin air! *It is unbelievable what autosuggestion can do...*

Running on Empty

Sunday, 24th June 1984

This evening my sister is getting married to her beloved Antony, after a passionate and adventurous love story of one year. It's hardly been three months ever since they got prematurely engaged, because Alice had a miscarriage -which meant that the two of them had consummated their love affair. Consequently, my father had demanded that they should be engaged at once, "before we become the scorn of the whole city".

As about the wedding, it was initially intended to take place next year. However, the groom is going to join the army in the camp of Tripolis at the end of next month, and Alice raised the roof the other day because she wants to go and visit Antony in Tripolis, every time he is on furlough. Once again our father remembered the traditional manners and customs: "This is unheard-of, an unmarried woman staying with her boyfriend for days! I won't allow it, unless you two get married!" he said. Just as I had expected, the crazy lovers didn't bear the slightest objection to getting married here and now.

Nice couple, anyway: Antony is 18 years old, Alice is 16, they both are very young, lively and good-looking. "They look like children who have dressed up as a groom and a bride for the carnival season," said uncle George, as soon as he saw them together in church. When the sacrament was over, there was a feast at home with dozens of guests. We all had a whale of a time...

Monday, 30th July 1984

For six months now, since the very next day of my return to Greece, I have been looking for a job feverishly. On one hand, I feel the need to earn my own money; on the other hand, the continuous pressure from my parents is terrible. So, with the Proficiency Certificate in hand, I have already sought work in hundreds of companies and English tutorial schools in Athens, Piraeus and suburbs. Yet, so far it has proved impossible for me to find even a part time job, probably because I haven't got any working experience.

However, maybe there is also something else to blame for my unemployment: When I go to apply for a job in an office, my sister usually comes along with me. As a result, personnel managers don't take me seriously because I carry my little sister along. She says she wishes to find work too, although she is only sixteen and a half years old and her only qualification is the gymnasium certificate. In addition, she is married and her husband wants her to stay at home and be a good housewife. Sometimes I have the impression that Alice is only trying to compete with me.

The only one who seemed willing to hire me as a secretary, was the owner of a car rental office near Omonia square, where I went on Friday afternoon. "You are good enough for me!" he said calmly, as soon as he heard that I can speak English and Italian and that I have finished a secretarial school. He warned me that I would have to work overtime very often, and that "in our company, secretaries bring their own typewriter at work". I didn't say no, although I found it weird: On one hand, the company has so many clients that I will have to work overtime; on the other hand, instead of furniture they use chopped tree trunks; moreover, their only typewriter is badly damaged and they can't afford to buy another.

Nevertheless, I agreed to start working this morning. My mother is enthusiastic about it, but my father seems to be a little troubled. "You might as well lose the typewriter" said aunt Lina, his elder sister, when dad phoned her yesterday and told her about my newly-found job. Finally, after a lot of wavering, at the last moment I decided to turn down this job...

Monday, 10th September 1984

After a month of summer relaxation, I have started looking for a job again. I've had enough with companies and English tutorial schools, though. Instead, I prefer to start giving private lessons of English. For this reason, I have placed a classified ad in the newspaper, and a week ago I finally managed to find my first pupil: His name is Constantine, he is in his thirties, married with a two-year-old child, and he lives in Kalamaki. He works as a waiter in an expensive restaurant and he wishes to learn some English so that he can communicate better with foreign customers.

No sooner had our third lesson started this morning, than his wife came into the room, paid me 500 drachmas for an one-hour lesson and announced that "Constantine hardly has any time to eat, still less to study English! That's why we must stop the lessons!"

I got a smack in the eye but didn't show any displeasure. I refused to get paid without having worked, but she insisted on my taking the money. So, I finally accepted the banknote and left, sad and perplexed, wondering what had gone wrong; maybe it was the fact that the previous time the gentleman was entirely unprepared and I told him he should study harder...

Friday, 14th September 1984

Fortunately, two days ago I managed to find another pupil: Her name is Vassia, she is twenty years old and she studies Literature. She lives in Hymettus, which is a little far from my home; I have to take two buses to get there, but never mind. This afternoon we had our first lesson, and I saw she has a good knowledge of the English language. She is also friendly and polite. I think we'll get along very well.

Wednesday, 19th September 1984

It was about 2:30 in the afternoon, when I had a phone call from a frenzied bloke who said he was the owner of an English tutorial school in Alimos. He explained that he had just seen my advertisement in the newspaper and that he was in urgent need of an English teacher, because one of his employees had just quit her job. Then he demanded that I should take a taxi and come to his school at once.

Twenty minutes later I was at his office. I was full of optimism, expecting to be hired on the spot. However, as soon as he saw me, the bald, skinny, black-dressed man made it clear that he wanted to get rid of me as soon as possible: "So, you have no working experience? But I thought you had some... I would prefer a teacher who's taught in a class before...". Nevertheless, while we were talking on the phone, he had not mentioned anything about working experience.

Thursday, 27th September 1984

This morning I saw an interesting ad in the newspaper, reading that "ladies with some knowledge of English are wanted as teachers in an English tuition centre in Athens". As soon as I arrived at the given address, I saw there was no signboard of the school. I found that strange,

but I rang the bell. When I got in, I was received by a dark-skinned guy, obviously of Asian origin, who acted as if he were the manager. He gave me a written and oral test, and he was very satisfied with my results. "You don't pronounce "r" so well", he only remarked. He told me that I would give private lessons to children at a price of 200 drachmas per hour, instead of 500 drachmas which is the usual. I noticed there were samples of Lower and Proficiency Certificates hanging on the walls. Paradoxically, all those papers were written in Greek. *Do they make these papers themselves?* I asked myself.

At that moment, the bell rang again and another candidate came in. She said she had no certificate, she had only finished the third class in English, and they didn't seem to like that. "Why, you want a Proficiency Certificate?" she wondered, and so did I: In their advertisement, they didn't ask for such qualifications; they only required "some knowledge of English".

Then, the school owner summoned me to his office. "I like you," he said twice, among other palaver, but I pretended I hadn't heard. Finally, he told me to come back tomorrow, so as to go to a pupil's house together with the Asian teacher and see how private lessons are taught.

As I was leaving, I noticed that next to the door there was a big signboard, reading "English by Labiris". *Why I didn't see that before?* I wondered but gave it no further consideration.

Friday, 28th September 1984

I can see this is all wrong, probably the whole thing is a fraud, but I'm also afraid of losing a good job opportunity and so are my parents. That's why this morning I went to "English by Labiris" again. Once again, the school owner

said he likes me and I acted the fool; then I agreed to go to a pupil's house in New Ionia, together with the Asian teacher.

The bus journey lasted about 50 minutes, and the bloke wouldn't stop playing the expert from England: "When I first came from London to Athens, I wasn't impressed by the Parthenon! I was more impressed by the countless tutorial schools everywhere! There is no serious education, here in Greece!" he said with an air of profundity. I pretended to agree, so as not to displease him and lose the great job. He went on with the verbal diarrhoea, constantly bragging about the super wow education he had had when he was in in England, until he flung in my teeth: "Really now, Yvonne, who do you think you are? You think you are a teacher? There are thousands like you!" I kept my mouth shut, because I hoped to get that envied job.

Finally, the private lesson proved to be a foul play: The fourteen-year-old girl sometimes said it was the first time she had met the Asian teacher, sometimes she acted as if she had known him for years. As about the "super teacher from England", he could hardly read a text and he pronounced the word "door" as "duur". Well, I didn't like the whole performance and I have no intention of working for rascals...

* * *

Sunday, 30th September 1984

When I returned from the baker's this morning, I found my father talking on the phone in a loud voice. As mum explained full of joy, dad was talking with a Mr Bill Kargas, who had responded to my advertisement about giving private lessons of English. "This is the opportunity we have been waiting for! He wants you for his tutorial

school on the island of Samos!” announced mum, exhilarated.

I was taken aback for a second, but I agreed to talk to the bloke on the phone; he seemed to be positive and willing to hire me, he even offered to pay for my plane ticket. He also promised to let me stay in his ancestral house for a small rent.

Taking into account that a) my parents and I are convinced that I will never find a permanent job in Athens, b) so far I haven't managed to find any other pupils apart from that girl in Hymettus, c) my parents are looking forward to my earning some money and helping with the house expenses, I didn't turn down the proposal.

So, after a lot of wavering, I finally decided to quit my only pupil and set out for Samos the very next day.

Monday, 8th October 1984

Mr Kargas' old house has proved to be a decrepit ruin, so I've been staying in a hotel ever since I arrived in Samos. The fact is that I have almost run out of money and I have to leave the island. As soon as I informed the boss this morning, he got frantic, he took me from the hotel at once and led me to his tutorial school; He will allow me to sleep in a store-room for a few nights, until I manage to find better lodgings, as he said.

I spend most hours of the day carrying out secretarial duties in the office. The amount of work is terrible, since the school year has just started. Every day I have to go through lots of correspondence, I type endless lists of names, I fill in hundreds of pupils' cards; actually, I organize the whole school for him.

I occasionally watch lessons as a spectator, in order to learn methodology, as Mr Kargas says. It is Wilma, his

obese American wife, who teaches most of the times, and she has accustomed the children to a mockery of a lesson: While she is in class, a loud hubbub of shouting and laughter is constantly heard, which is often fomented by the “teacher” herself. She never takes the pupils' notebooks at home; she spends a lot of time correcting compositions and dictations on the spot, losing all control of the class.

This afternoon she wasted half of the lesson making the children act sneezing, according to a story in the reading-book. “A-ti-shu!” the whole class was shouting, for half an hour or more. All pupils, included those of higher classes, know almost nothing about English vocabulary and grammar, they can hardly even read. Nevertheless, Mr Kargas is always praising his wife's teaching skills: “My Wilma has taken many awards for her unique methods,” he brags.

It's a mystery though: The lessons given at the Kargas Tuition Centre are a fiasco, there aren't any Lower or Proficiency classes, yet most parents don't care about this and they prefer his school. His branches in Samos and Pythagorio are the most successful tutorial schools on the island, counting more than 400 pupils...

Thursday, 11th October 1984

This morning Mr Bill and I went to his school in Pythagorio, so as to watch him teaching and get an idea of his wondrous methodologies. During the whole journey, once again I had to put up with his incessant bragging about how perfect he has always been in his job, even when he and his family lived in Congo, from where they had to flee overnight, leaving everything behind, six years ago. He didn't explain why, he only mentioned that his father had gone bankrupt ten times, in contrast to him who has always

been very successful.

“I am a hard-working man, I can't stand losing my time; I'm not like your father, who is a lazy pensioner,” he concluded, and I was speechless at his insolence.

“Your father is a lazy idler, isn't he?” he said sarcastically.

I pretended I hadn't listened.

“Isn't it so?” he insisted ironically.

“Yes,” I replied in a low voice.

“Eeeeh?”

“Yes,” I repeated louder, so as to please the boss.

He shut up only when we arrived at his branch in Pythagorio. While he was teaching the third class, I was sitting at the last desk with a typewriter in front of me, typing an endless list of pupils' names during the lesson. *So much of a lesson...*

On the way back to Samos, the boss suddenly stopped the car in the middle of nowhere and announced we had run out of petrol. After a few minutes of pointless discussion, “what shall we do now, etc”, he said that the best thing he could do was go and find a friend of his who lives nearby, so as to borrow some fuel. This means that I had to wait in the car for 20 minutes, all alone at the back of beyond, until he came back with a jerrycan of petrol in hand.

In all probability, the bloke was not at all in need of petrol; he just hoped to get something else from me while he was dragging me into the wilderness...

Monday, 15th October 1984

It's been three days since Mr Kargas first allowed me to teach for a few hours in the afternoons. This means that I have to work more than eight hours per day, taking into account that I still have to carry out lots of secretarial duties. Yet, all I get is ironic remarks: “You don't even know how to

talk on the phone! Hellooooo... People will think we are bums!” ... “You are weak-willed, you lack initiative” ... “You have no gumption, and I can't do the thinking for you” and so forth.

All things considered, the podgy little man with the mouse-like face who happens to be my boss, is nothing but a hysterical workaholic clodhopper. He is always swinging around like a whirligig, actually doing nothing but complaining about everything. He often gives me wrong or inadequate instructions regarding the lessons; as a result, I make inevitable mistakes for which he reprimands me later.

This morning, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find my teacher's book. I searched and searched everywhere for hours, nothing! Telling the boss about it was out of the question. The blasting I would get for losing that book, would be unprecedented. So, I preferred to go to a bookstore and buy a new book, with my own money. However, just two minutes before the lesson had started, I found the old coursebook in its usual place in the bookcase. Strange, isn't it?

Wednesday, 17th October 1984

I have begun to suspect that dear Mr Kargas has set up an “intelligence network” for me, engaging family and friends as his spies: Almost every evening he makes sure that I go out with his twin twelve-year-old daughters who, oddly enough, are mature and polite children.

Moreover, a few days ago I first met (by chance?) Rita, a woman of my age, who works as a hair-dresser. We were having lunch in the same restaurant, and it was her who first talked to me. She seems to be a kind and interesting person, and we became friends very quickly.

This evening, while we were going on a walk, we happened to meet Mr Kargas on the road. The two of them started talking joyfully, and it was crystal clear to me that they've known each other for a long time.

Friday, 19th October 1984

Mr Bill himself seldom loses sight of me and he always makes sure to come with me when I search for new lodgings. He says he doesn't want to me to fall a victim to some impostor, and he insists on choosing himself my new house. He also says he is willing to pay for my first rent. The truth is that he does everything he can to sabotage every attempt of mine to find accommodation: Whenever I try to make an arrangement with a landlord, he always chips in and claims that the house I've just found is unsuitable for me for lots of possible or impossible reasons.

Yesterday I managed to find a nice, independent, cheap chamber situated on the roof of a house. This evening I had an appointment with the elderly house owner, and Mr Kargas insisted on coming with me. Soon he started arguing with the landlord, and finally he triggered off a nasty row. As a result, we left empty-handed.

Right after that preposterous incident, Mr Kargas took me to a nearby hotel. The owner proved to be a friend of his. We asked for a cheap room for me -to no avail, of course, all single rooms were occupied. In the end, the hotel owner agreed to accommodate me in the basement for a few days. It is not so bad here, but obviously I can't stay long.

Tuesday, 22nd October 1984

Finally! This morning I managed to find me a furnished room near the city centre! It is sunny and spacious, and the landlady is a polite, calm woman. Mr

Kargas didn't manage to draw her into a quarrel, and he made a very sour face when he paid 5000 drachmas for my first rent, as he had promised.

I was greatly surprised, when the Kargases invited me out tonight. It was late in the evening when we all got in their car, with a view of going to a taverna in Pythagorio. We arrived there but we didn't stop, as I had expected; the head of the family kept on driving until we were out of the town.

After a while he turned back and drove through Pythagorio again; then, he took the way back to Samos, and finally he stopped outside an abandoned mansion in the middle of nowhere. As the boss explained, the old house belonged to Moira, an old family friend who had followed them from Congo and helped them set up the tutorial school in Samos. "However, Moira left the island years ago," concluded Mr Kargas with a smirk.

I was really flabbergasted when they all agreed to wait outside the big rusty street door for a while, in case their old friend made a miraculous appearance in the weedy garden! So, we all stayed inside the parked car and waited. The time was already 00:30 after midnight. Twenty minutes later, Moira's ghost hadn't deigned to appear yet; Mr Kargas feigned disappointment and he said we had better go.

Thursday, 25th October 1984

While I was getting ready to start my lesson this afternoon, the boss informed me that this time I would have to begin half an hour earlier than usual. Yet, he gave me to understand I would finish at the usual time. Nor did he come and stop me tactfully when I exceeded the expected teaching time. When I finally finished, he was mad at me because some parents kept phoning again and again, very worried

about the half-hour delay of their children, as he said. Then he burst out shouting that I am a discredit to his school, that all pupils complain about my strictness, that I am completely spineless and unable to achieve anything in life because I am nothing but a loser. In the end, he demanded that I should resign at once, before I destroy his good reputation on the island.

Friday, 26th October 1984

Mr Kargas was more than willing to repeat all the above to my mother, who arrived in Samos this morning so as to bring me some needful things. "Pity! We wanted to hug her as if she were our own child!" he concluded and made a characteristic gesture of embrace, which surprised both my mother and me.

He, my mother and I had met in the main square of the city a few hours before: Mum was taken aback when she first saw the sweaty, flushed up, frantic, stumpy man, who was running here and there in the heat of the noon, as if he were out of his mind.

"I'm always on the run, what can I do? I'm awfully busy with the school all day, but what can I do? Send pupils away?" he broke out, in a hysterical condition, and then he ran away as if chased by hound dogs.

"This man is a neurasthenic! Didn't your father realize that when he talked on the phone with the lunatic?" mum wondered.

Saturday, 27th October 1984

The end of the story: Mr Kargas refused to pay me for one whole month I have been working for him night and day. He gave me nothing, not even one drachma, because, as he claimed, he has already paid a lot of money for my

expenses in Samos! Of course, the enrollment period is over now, I have organized the whole school for this year, and he doesn't need me anymore.

So here I am, on the ship to Athens, together with my mother, the TV set and some other things she had brought me, since we all thought I would stay on the island for eight more months. I'm standing at the stern of the ship, which has just departed, and I am experiencing untold relief as I'm slowly leaving the port, the city, the island, further and further behind.

Another horrible adventure of mine has finally reached an end. I can hardly believe I have just escaped from a nightmare, for a second time in a year...

Apprenticeship

So, I am back home again, right on time to enroll in the State School of Tourism in Saronis, after my success in the entrance examinations of June. I am one of the best students in class, I can't say that I have any problem with the school or the people here, yet I can't avoid certain familiar situations: Once again I feel alienated; I really wish to approach the other students, but it just proves to be impossible. Most of the times it is as if I bumped against an invisible wall of ice. I usually keep company with the three most boring girls in the class, who call me Nonny (how dull!). As about the boys, the only one who shows an interest in me is Dennis, a greenhorn with a big head and a plump body, who likes to call me “Bonn” and when I get angry he wonders why...

Wednesday, 27th March 1985

My class is on a five-day trip on the island of Rhodes. We have been here for three days now. At first I was in no mood for something like that, and I decided to take part at the last moment. I'm having a wonderful time here, even if I feel left out sometimes. In the mornings we go for walks in the city of Rhodes or we visit big hotels. In the evenings we have fun in glamorous clubs and pubs with live music. We have also visited many interesting sights such as the Acropolis of Lindos, the Medicinal Baths of Kallithea, the Seven Springs, the Valley of Butterflies etc.

This afternoon we happened to find a football and we decided to play on a prairie near Filerimos. I have never

liked this game but I tried to do my best; I even managed to intercept a tall player of the rival team once.

However, soon it proved to be too difficult for me to get the ball, to go after a rival player, to dribble and all that. Strangely enough, all the other girls could play better than me. "Is Yvonne with us?" joked Mr Golfis, our teacher, every now and then. Soon nobody made a pass to me, and after some boring minutes I preferred to withdraw without saying a word to anybody. Anyway, in all likelihood nobody noticed my absence.

... I took a narrow, stone path which went up a green hillside; all around me there were tall trees in leaf, small sunny glades, wild flowers in bloom, no people; just blissful serenity under a blue sky and a bright sun. My classmates seemed to be millions of miles away. I had a strange feeling, as if there was no other human being on earth. I walked all the way up the hill, all alone in that isolated green paradise. Spontaneously I let myself unwind, all worries faded away, any sense of time was lost. For the first time in my life I was feeling complete, balanced, happy, alive. I was one with the thriving, unspoilt nature that surrounded me. Everything looked shiny and vibrant, from the tallest tree to the weakest grass blade; it was as if an esoteric truth was being conveyed to me from the whole world -a truth I could not put in words, but it filled my soul with an unprecedented sense of nirvana. The most outstanding experience of my whole life...

When I reached the end of the path, in front of the wooden gate of a Frankish monastery, I took the way back almost mechanically. I started walking down slowly, unwillingly, pausing every now and then, silently bidding farewell to every leaf, every flower, every shadow, leaving behind one by one the pieces of that secret paradise.

Suddenly I heard people talking behind me, which annoyed me a lot. An aged couple had just come out of the monastery and they were already walking down the path, getting closer and closer to me. Their loud voices and footfalls destroyed all the magic. I accelerated my pace, so as to get away from them. "Reality" was calling me back peremptorily, and I could do nothing but obey...

Friday, 17th May 1985

This morning we brought home my baby nephew, who will be named Yanni. He is my sister's first child and he is only six days old. Four days ago, when we first saw him in the maternity clinic, he was a hairy, flushed up, wrinkled little thing, cute but ugly. He looks a lot better now: He is beautiful, sweet and funny; he has rosy cheeks, sad eyes, and bad hiccups. My sister has been holding him in her lap for an hour or so, and she is sad and worried because she doesn't know what to do to make him stop.

As about the boy's parents, they are still a rather adventurous couple: Antony is still crude and violent, he always shouts and beats up Alice over a trifle. He has a permanent job as a carpenter's assistant but he spends all his money in extravagant hobbies: scuba diving, boats, fishing equipment and that sort of thing. Every time (that is quite often) we hear screams coming from upstairs, my parents run to my sister's apartment, so as to prevent Antony from thrashing the life out of Alice. Moreover, they often help the couple financially.

My sister is whining all the time but she actually likes the whole situation because she is madly in love with Antony. She thinks that smacks are a proof of love and the more she gets beaten up the more she feels like a diva. She looks down on me because I don't have a boyfriend, and she

often accuses my parents of interfering with her family affairs; however, she enjoys bleeding them for lots of money time after time...

Wednesday, 22nd May 1985

In the meanwhile, a new problem has come into my life and it's driving me crazy: The fat, illiterate, boorish tenant who has rented our ground floor is in the habit of playing the shepherd's flute, three notes all the time, always out in the yard so that the whole neighbourhood can admire him. He plays non-stop from 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, when he returns from work, to 1:00 after midnight! At weekends, when he doesn't work, he plays from 7:00 in the morning to 1:00 after midnight, without a break! This means that we are obliged to hear that nerve-racking noise for 10-18 hours every day! It is impossible for me to get any peace, day or night!

At 3:30 this afternoon, after having suffered that horrible noise pollution since 7:00 in the morning, I finally flew off the handle and burst out shouting:

"I've had enough with that boor downstairs, he does nothing all day but play that awful flute! We can't have a moment's quiet!"

"Sssst! He will hear you!" said my mother.

Next moment, the boor disappeared into the house. Better late than never...

Monday, 27th May 1985

The results of the final exams in the State School of Tourism have just come out. I am fourth in the list of best grades, which means I will be the fourth to select the hotel where I will serve my apprenticeship during the summer. I am very happy about it because, in all probability, I will

have the opportunity to choose the hotel Galactic, where my school belongs. I will be feeling secure and comfortable there, since I already know the people and the environment.

This morning, just a few minutes before we had entered the class, I was accosted by Mary, a vamp classmate, who during the whole school year hadn't even said "hello" to me. Accompanied by a large group of her friends, she explained to me that she wished to do her practice at the hotel Carmen, which is in Patissia, near her house. The problem is that she is very low in the list of grades, so she isn't likely to have the chance of choosing that hotel:

"I will be obliged to come to Galactic, which is too far for me. If they send me here, I won't serve my apprenticeship, and I won't take my diploma" she said sadly.

"Won't you be able to take the hotel coach, as usual?" I wondered.

"There is no coach during the summer months and I can't stand the heat in the buses," she answered with a frown.

Then, one of her friends started explaining to me a traditional trick done on this occasion every year: "When your turn comes, you will choose the hotel Carmen, and Mary will choose Galactic..."

"How can we be sure that Mary will be able to choose Galactic? What if someone else wants it first?" I asked.

"Oh, don't worry, no one wants to come here!" answered another one. "Now listen: When the selection procedure is over, you will raise your hand and say that you have changed your mind and that you want to exchange hotels with another person. Mary will answer to your proposal, and both of you will finally get what you really want!"

"What if the teachers refuse to let us exchange?"

"Don't be afraid, they have never refused, there is no such risk!" they all reassured me.

Just as expected, when the selection procedure was over, one of the three teachers asked the class: "Does anyone of you wish to add something?"

About fifteen pupils raised their hands, but the teachers asked me to speak first.

"I have just changed my mind; I wish to exchange the hotel Carmen for Galactic," I said. Mary, who had chosen Galactic, raised her hand and agreed to my proposal. So far so good.

"Oh, the same story," said the teacher smiling. She turned and whispered something to the colleague standing next to her, and then she answered to me:

"I understand you are doing this so as to help your classmate, but it isn't right to sacrifice yourself for others. For this reason, we won't accept the exchange!"

I could hardly believe my ears.

"But... Mary can't come here, all the way from Patissia to Saronis, in the heat of the summer! If you don't accept the exchange, Mary won't do her practice in any hotel! Besides, I actually want to serve my apprenticeship here, at the hotel Galactic!" I protested, to no avail of course.

Needless to say, after that incident none of the other pupils dared ask an exchange.

* * *

Thursday, 20th June 1985

Since the beginning of this month I have been serving my apprenticeship as an assistant receptionist at the hotel Carmen. It is a beautiful, luxurious hotel, and the people are kind and friendly. However, it is very far from my home and commuting takes me about four hours every day. At least, these four months of apprenticeship will give me some

working experience which will help me find a proper job later, I suppose.

Unfortunately, every day I have to put up with Zeta, an arrogant and disagreeable colleague who used to be my classmate at the School of Tourism. Quite unexpectedly, she has come to do her practice at the hotel Carmen too, even if she wasn't really entitled to it: Having done really bad in the final exams, she should have ended up on some island. However, she was finally admitted here because, as she boasts with an air of importance, she often goes out with Mr Makris, a sixty-year-old teacher at the School of Tourism.

Anyway, she doesn't seem to appreciate the post she has been given: This morning, when I told her that I like it here and that I would like to be hired as a permanent employee, she let herself go almost angry:

"I certainly don't intend to spend all my life in a hotel reception! I am not a mollycoddle, I want a job with action and prospects!"

"So, what are you doing here?" I wondered.

"I am here for the experience only!" she replied pompously.

"And you will waste four months of your life for an experience that doesn't really matter to you?"

"Yes, but I won't stop here! I'm not a sleepyhead like you, I want an adventurous job!"

"Such as?"

"I am going to be a tourist guide one day!"

"So, we are talking about great adventure!" I couldn't help mocking.

Right then, the chief receptionist came and assigned us with certain tasks: I entered some customers' charges on the computer and Zeta did some filing. Fortunately, the discussion was interrupted at the right moment, for I had no idea how it would end...

Thursday, 27th June 1985

It is getting more and more obvious to me that some people here don't like me. This is probably due to the fact that Zeta is constantly slandering me to everybody. Strangely enough, they all believe what she says and they are always on her side. As about me, I do my best every day at work, I am always polite, willing and efficient, but nobody seems to be impressed.

On the other hand, it's true that sometimes I don't know where I stand: When there is no work to do, I have to show that I am occupied with something, otherwise they will grumble that I'm lazy. When I really have work to do, they often complain I get in their way.

“What will the hotel owner say, if he happens to see you checking out a customer? So, let us be and do some filing!” I was reprimanded today by Kelly, one of the receptionists, who is not so friendly as she usually wants to show.

By the way, doesn't the big boss know that the hotel hires pupils from the School of Tourism during the summer? I wondered but said nothing, because I didn't want tempers to become frayed.

Sunday, 14th July 1985

Since there was not much work to be done at the reception this morning, a colleague asked me to do some filing. A few minutes later I was accosted by the personnel manager, a wayward guy who is always ready for a row. “Why are you doing here? This isn't your job!” he snapped out and snatched the customers' cards from my hands. I tried to contain myself but it was too hard. I burst into tears and ran to the toilet immediately, lest anyone should see me crying. However, when I got there, a chambermaid saw me

tearing and she considered it good to preach me a sermon: “Woe is you if they find out how sensitive you are! They will make your life miserable!” she told me. That didn't comfort me at all, but I could see she was right.

From that moment on, a tormenting fear started to wring my heart, especially during working hours. I was constantly frightened at the thought that something would go wrong, that the others might form a negative opinion of me or, even worse, that my sensitivity would be known and everybody in the hotel would turn against me. It took me about a week to control myself, calm down and get rid of that phobia.

Monday, 29th July 1985

That weirdie of Zeta never stops trying to be clever, or criticizing me for everything. I can't stand her anymore. This morning, once again she started bragging about her great achievements: “When I finished high school, nine years ago, I left my family for good. They live in Edessa, and I haven't seen them ever since. I'm not like some mollycoddles, who never get any further than their mother's skirt!” (*that was a hint about me: not only do I keep contact with my parents, but I also live with them*) ... “You go to bed at midnight? So early? What a milksop you are! I stay up and watch TV till three or four o'clock in the morning!” (*admire me, I am a neurasthenic!*) ... “You go swimming at the beach of Voula? That's only a ten-minute ride from your home!” (*what a shame!*) ... “I'm going to succeed in life, my ambitions soar high; not like you, who will always be a lowly-paid employee!” she burst out finally.

Alright, she was asking for it. I took a deep breath and started talking:

“Obviously, you think you are my superior here; let me

remind you that in this hotel you and I are exactly in the same position! And you are five years older than me!” That left her speechless for a while.

Tuesday, 20th August 1985

All day today Zeta kept on criticizing the way I dress: “Why do you always wear such clothes? Have you seen anyone else dress like you?”

“Of course I have! All women dress like me!” I snapped out. *I usually wear dresses, or a blouse with a skirt or trousers. So? What's so bad about the way I dress?* I wondered, rather irritated.

At that moment Kelly approached us with an enigmatic smile on her face; I didn't like that, because she always agrees with Zeta. The two of them walked away together, and talked in low voices for a few minutes; then they approached me again and installed themselves on my desk, in a most ostentatious manner. Next moment they started describing certain pieces of clothing they had, so as to excite my envy -*they are crazy!* That ridiculous bragging lasted about a quarter of an hour. I pretended I wasn't listening, as I was doing some paper work at that time...

Running on Empty Again

Saturday, 23rd November 1985

It's two months now that I have been out of work. At the end of September all apprentices from the School of Tourism were fired from the hotel Carmen, me included. In overall, I can't say I had a bad time there, especially in comparison with the horrible experience of Samos. I have been looking for another job ever since, but I haven't found anything yet.

Aunt Penelope paid us a visit this morning. We were having a pleasant conversation about summer holidays, when suddenly she changed the subject:

“So, you don't work in the hotel Carmen anymore...”

“No, I don't; all apprentices were fired two months ago”

“Pity... Anyway, I've been informed that all those who served their apprenticeship in the hotel Galactic are still there, hired as permanent employees; and they've kept a beautiful, agreeable girl at the reception,” she said smiling. I was very disappointed at the news, but I didn't say anything; I only wondered: *How does my aunt know all this?*

Monday, 2nd December 1985

This morning I went to apply for a job in a big travel agency in Athens. They are looking for an office employee with good knowledge of English and German. I was optimistic about this job, because I also have the diploma from the School of Tourism.

Yet, soon my enthusiasm started to wane: Firstly, the personnel manager made me wait outside his office for an

hour, although he wasn't doing any work. When he finally summoned me to his office, he seemed to be positive towards me -although he minced his words regarding the working hours: "This is a full time job, eight to ten hours per day" ("eight to ten hours" means "endless hours") ... "We offer the basic salary and we don't pay overtime" ... "This is hard work, it demands intelligence and eloquence" etc. I kept saying "yes" to everything, lest I should lose the ideal job.

"One of your duties will be to welcome tourists who come from abroad," he went on.

I liked that, because I thought I would be doing this during my working hours.

"So, you must always be ready to receive a phone call telling you to go to the airport or the seaport, receive a group of tourists and take them to their hotel!"

"No problem!" I was beforehand in answering.

"This may happen any time, but it usually happens at night! For example, we might phone you at 3:00 a.m. and tell you that you must be at the airport in an hour!"

After the first shock, I dared ask: "You mean, after having worked ten hours in the office, I will have to scour airports and harbours in the middle of the night, looking for certain groups of tourists?"

"Exactly, this is how we work here!"

"But I don't even have a car..."

I can't remember what was said afterwards; I was only looking forward to getting out of there as soon as possible.

Sunday, 8th December 1985

This evening we had an unexpected phone call: It was Mrs Daphne, an old friend of my mother, who hasn't shown up for seventeen years. "I am the one who must make the

first step to revive the old friendship,” she said slowly, as soon as my mum picked up the receiver. After a few moments of surprise, the two women talked calmly for a while, they made it up again, and Mrs Daphne ended up: “Yvonne will help Persephone with her homework, too!”.

My mother didn't bear any objections to that, neither did I; anyway, I have plenty of time and no friends. So, we arranged for the eleven-year-old Persephone, Mrs Daphne's daughter, to visit me two or three times a week. She is in the sixth class of elementary school and she needs help with maths, physics and Greek language.

Tuesday, 28th January 1986

As months go by, I keep on searching high and low for any job. I have been to hundreds of companies, applying for any post, even that of a factory worker. However, no employer has been willing to hire me so far, despite my new qualifications: The diploma from the State School of Tourism, my four-month practice as an assistant receptionist in the hotel Carmen, my good knowledge of typing, plus my fluent Italian, English and German. The main problem is that in a society where backstairs influence is everything, my family is the only one which can pull no strings at all.

This morning I had a reason to believe that the miracle would happen: My father took me to a big company in Marousi (a four-hour commuting), where an old friend of his works as a manager. “I will talk to him about you; maybe he will hire you as a secretary,” dad explained to me and I started to hope.

During their conversation, dad was all joy and smiles, but he didn't utter a word about me. Finally, five minutes before our leaving, he let drop the brick: “If possible, I would like my daughter to come here and help you, even

without being paid! All I want, is that she gains some working experience! She can type fast, she can speak English, Italian and German...”

The manager agreed smiling, but I froze.

Conclusion: I will never be hired in that company, not even unpaid. Fortunately...

Friday, 31st January 1986

This evening Persephone came round and I helped her do her maths and physics homework. It took us about two hours. When we finished, we talked about various subjects such as show business, school, and social problems -as usual. I am really impressed at Persephone's maturity and cleverness. She is an agreeable person, with long blond hair and big blue eyes. If she weren't so obese, she would be very beautiful. Of course, I don't care about her looks. I have a good time with her, I think we are ideologically compatible, and she thinks the same too. “I like chatting with Yvonne,” she says to her mother. Sometimes I get tired because her homework takes us hours, but at least I have got a friend now...

Wednesday, 5th February 1986

In response to an advertisement in the newspaper, regarding a vacancy for a typist, this morning I went to an office in Athens, which sends and receives telexes for other companies. It proved to be a poky, frowsty room without windows, full of big telex machines, piles of books and lots of dust. The boss was a plump, grim-looking, smarmy man, whom I didn't like at all. He gave me a minute examination in typing, English and Italian, he made many personal questions, he even asked me how often I get sick! The only thing he didn't examine was my knowledge of German,

because he doesn't know this language. As he told me, he needs an employee because his permanent secretary is on a monthly leave of absence. This means that if he hires me, he will keep me for one month only. However, I wasn't daunted; even one month of working experience is better than nothing.

Friday, 7th February 1986

The bloke with the telexes called me this morning and told me to come to his office immediately. I was very happy because I thought he wanted me to start working at once. However, when I got there, I found out he was not alone: He was in the company of a middle-aged lady who proved to be German and started talking to me in German. I was a little embarrassed because I didn't expect an oral test, but I think I did quite well. "I will call you soon," said the boss finally, but I know that he never will.

The fact is that relatives and neighbours have begun to wonder about my continuing failure in finding a job: "Such bad luck with work! Could it be Yvonne's fault?" wondered aunt Penelope this afternoon, when I told her about my recent adventures...

* * *

Monday, 17th February 1986

Some days ago a new hope for employment appeared unexpectedly: One of my father's friends has a nephew, who is a successful accountant with lots of public relations and he will certainly find a post for me, as he said.

This afternoon, at about 4:00 o'clock, that great nephew phoned me at last. He introduced himself as Mr Demis Dragonas and he told me to take a taxi at once and

come to the hotel Lyra in Vouliagmeni. He said he would be waiting for me there till 4:30, and he insinuated I would be hired immediately as a restaurant cashier.

Twenty minutes later I arrived at the accounts department of the hotel Lyra, beaming with optimism. However, it didn't take me long to understand that Mr Dragonas didn't think very highly of me: "So, you only have a Certificate of Proficiency in English? Haven't you studied abroad?" ... "Besides, your diploma from the State School of Tourism is not a university degree" ... "Moreover, you have no working experience" ... "This job requires a lot of sprightliness, I'm not sure if you can do it; of course, I don't know how high your intelligence quotient is" etc, etc, etc...

Monday, 3rd March 1986

I had almost forgot the above case until today, when I received an unexpected phone call at 2:00 p.m.: I jumped for joy when I heard it was Mr Dragonas, asking me to take a taxi at once and come to his office in New Faliron, because he was in urgent need of an assistant in the exports department! I set out without a second of delay.

Right from the first moment, the mouse-faced Mr Dragonas and his scarlet wife, Lisa, showed their nasty characters: "You must know, Yvonne, that every move you make will be watched! Even how you hold the pen, shows who you are!" ... "You must always do exactly what you are told; as soon as you make the first mistake, you will be fired on the spot!" ... "You have a lot to learn here! For the first six months you will be an apprentice, so you will only get a symbolic salary!" ... "And remember: There is a lot of unemployment out there!". Not only did I say "yes" to everything, but I also felt extremely lucky that I had found a job at last...

Friday, 21st March 1986

Ever since I got hired by Mr Dragonas, I have been striving to meet the incredible demands of my job, as I am responsible not only for exports but for all kinds of errands as well. Every evening I return home exhausted and every morning I wake up tired, feeling that I haven't rested enough. Frankly, I don't know how I manage to pull through all that work, day in day out.

From 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. I do office work or, most of the times, I run to all public services in the basin of Attiki so as to transact various bureaucratic formalities. Sometimes the boss gives me wrong instructions, so I toil in vain and then he gets mad at me. From 2:00 to 7:00 p.m. I run to various clients all around Attiki, to give or take documents. I usually arrive home at 9:00 in the evening, exhausted and exasperated.

More often than not, I have to wait in endless queues for hours. Again I get a blasting because, as they tell me, I'm not capable of getting the job done “cleverly”, that is out of turn: “It's time you learned how to move in those places! If you had gumption, you wouldn't get stuck in queues!” yelled Demis this morning because, according to him, I had wasted too much time in the Tax Office.

As about Lisa, she spends all the working hours painting her nails, fixing her make up and admiring herself in her mirror. She is quite attractive, 20 years younger than her husband, and madly in love with his money. It is her younger cousin, Mina, who carries through all the work and treats me more humanely. Without her, there would be no job done correctly in this office...

Tuesday, 15th April 1986

I'm sick and tired of this all: During all those endless hours I spend in the office, I am obliged to put up with all kinds of humiliating remarks, ironic comments or direct insults that often reach the limits of terrorism.

This morning I happened to make a wrong photocopy and the big boss flew off the handle: "I just can't believe it! You aren't capable of doing even the simplest job right! Do me a favour, Mina," he turned to his sister-in-law, "You go and make the correct photocopy, otherwise we won't get that job done!" Then he turned to me again and groaned: "Listen well: This is the first and the last time I have tolerated a mistake from you! At the second mistake you are out of here! Got it?"

"Yes, sir," I stammered.

"And keep in mind: If you can't cope with this job, you will never be able to cope with any other job!"

Monday, 21st April 1986

This morning Mr Dragonas arrived at the office at ten o'clock. He was all nerves, as usual, and he ordered me to bring him some coffee at once. "Stir it!" he shouted as soon as I left the cup in front of him. I obeyed with trembling hands. "Again!" he yelled and I obeyed again.

An hour later, the big boss interrupted me from drawing up a client's balance (paradoxically, credit never equals debit in these balances; yet those great accountants I work for consider this normal) and summoned me to his office. Soon it became clear that all he wanted was to lecture me about productivity:

"All employees must be equally good and always excel in their work! A company is like a barrel full of wine: What happens, Yvonne, if any hoop is damaged?" he asked me

with a cunning smile.

“All the wine will be spilled,” I replied in a low voice, like a schoolgirl saying the lesson to a strict teacher.

“Correct! That's why you should work even harder, so as not to be detrimental to our company!” he concluded triumphantly.

“Yes, sir!”

Anyway, now that I'm thinking better about it, I can see that if a “hoop” is damaged, not all the “wine” is always spilled. It depends on *how high* the damaged hoop is: If it is near the top, almost no wine will be wasted; however, if the bad hoop is low, then most of the wine will be wasted. Conclusion: It is the lower employees who actually run the companies. The higher ones are mostly decorative...

Tuesday, 6th May 1986

After nine hours of exhausting work in and out of the office, Mr Dragonas ordered me not to leave but wait for him until he finished some phone calls. I waited for more than an hour and then he kept me standing in his office for one more hour, bombarding me with all kinds of complaints: “You are not as hardworking as you should be” ... “You don't take any initiatives” ... “You are not sprightly enough” ... “You are not quick on the uptake” etc.

When I protested that I work incessantly all day, always doing my best, he answered disdainfully: “This is not enough! What you have been doing for us up to now is only a drop in the ocean, in comparison with what you should be doing! And don't forget! There is a lot of unemployment out there! I want you to promise me that from now on you will be working harder and faster!”

“I will, sir” I replied. If I had disagreed to anything, he would have never let me go home...

Wednesday, 7th May 1986

Obviously, all that performance had only one purpose: to terrorize me, and it did: This morning I was feeling frightened just at the thought of going to the office.

“As soon as you came in, her blood ran cold!” I heard Lisa telling him.

“No kidding! She was scared stiff!” agreed the dragon malignantly.

The only thing that made me feel a little better, was the fact that a little later Demis called his wife in his office and hauled her over the coals! Only that she wasn't so submissive as I was: “If you don't like the way I work, you had better hire a qualified accountant! One who will ask for a salary!” she retorted, and that made him shut up for a while.

Friday, 9th May 1986

This is the last day for the submission of tax returns. From now on there won't be so much work to do, so I might calm down a little. So, I was unpleasantly surprised when Mr Dragonas summoned me to his office late in the afternoon, as I was getting ready to leave. *Here comes another blowing-up*, I feared. However, as soon as I got into his office, Demis started praising my qualifications and my efficiency, only to conclude that he was “unfortunately” obliged to fire me on the spot because he could no longer afford my tidy salary, which till then I had no idea how high (or low) it was.

Anyway, I can't say I wasn't expecting it at all: For days now I've suspected that Lisa wishes to take my position. It was only yesterday when I heard her say that she is usually in charge of the exports department and that she

prefers running on errands to spending her hours in the office. Nevertheless, she certainly wouldn't fancy running here and there like crazy during the peak season (from the beginning of March till today), when there is so much frenzy with the tax returns. For that hectic period they hired me to pull the chestnuts from the fire.

Finally, I got half of the basic salary as a reward for my services. Not so bad; I thought that the “symbolic salary” would be much lower. It goes without saying that I got no stamps at all. In the end, Demis assured me that he was very pleased with me and that if he ever needed an assistant in the future, he would hire no one else but me.

* * *

Monday, 9th June 1986

Miracles do happen: A week ago I finally managed to find a part time job (two days a week, three hours each time) as a correspondent in the company “Kyriakides Bros SA”, which imports auto spare parts from Italy.

For a couple of days I kept on looking for something better, but this morning I got a revolutionary idea: Quit searching for a full time job and make do with my part time job and the housework, which takes me hours every day. Frankly, I'm sick and tired of looking for work in the classified ads, begging the bosses to hire me as an underpaid slave. Besides, there is no real financial need, since my father gets a good pension as a retired captain and my personal expenses are pretty limited: I neither demand flashy clothes, nor go out to cafeterias, discos, clubs etc. As about stamps, I'll think about what I can do about it. In any case, there is no lack of money in our home. So, why worry? Anyway, what will be will be.

As soon as I came up with that wonderful idea, I started feeling a lot better...

Monday, 16th June 1986

Last Friday I bought a newspaper on the spur of the moment. When I got home, I had a quick look at the classified ads and I immediately noticed the following advertisement: "Secretary needed urgently by an import company in New Smyrna. Candidates must be fast in typing and fluent in Italian and English. No working experience required".

The phrase "no working experience required" was what made me answer to the above advertisement. I went there for an interview right away and despite my initial pessimism the boss, a polite man who introduced himself as Mr Lucas Zafirakis, finally agreed to hire me full time, starting from today! He offers the basic salary and stamps -I'm talking about luxury! I can hardly believe it!

The company is called Vinomec and imports wining machinery from Italy. I managed to get the position of secretary because I was the only candidate able and willing to listen to a text in Greek and simultaneously type it in English or Italian. According to the boss, all the other girls he had seen, most of them with university degrees from England or Italy, had either messed up everything or refused to do such a demanding test.

December 1986

The first months at work rolled on smoothly, without serious problems; those started to appear later. In general, Mr Zafirakis is a quiet and good-hearted person, but my job is extremely demanding: Apart from a typist and a telephone operator, I am also in charge of imports and I sub for the

boss when he is absent. Besides, I am always under the watchful eye of Mrs Stasa: She is Lucas' mother-in-law, who first appeared in the office the next day I was hired -obviously to keep a discreet watch on me.

The job requires a great sense of responsibility, careful manipulations, risky initiatives and specialized knowledge not only of imports but of wine machinery as well. I'm not complaining though; I actually like this job because it is interesting and challenging. Moreover, I get a regular salary, stamps and social security -things once I couldn't even dream of...

December 1987

As time goes by, the boss becomes more and more demanding. While he is in the office, he never stops grumbling about my efficiency at work; when he is absent, that is often, I have to untangle the most complicated problems without any guidance.

Very often I find myself in the middle of uncontrollable situations with wayward customers and nonfunctional public services. If someone in Italy sends a fax too late, I am to blame. If I press them to send that fax, I am still to blame for getting obtrusive. Moreover, I often have to work overtime without getting any extra payment.

In the meanwhile, my friendship with Persephone is getting stronger and stronger. We meet two or three times a week and we chat about everything. Sometimes she is too exigent in her homework and she gets on my nerves. Yet, I always turn a blind eye, maybe because: "Yvonne should be in other circles now, but since she isn't, she may go out with Persa," as Mrs Daphne said to my mother the other day.

The last time I visited Persephone, she had unexpected visitors: It was Mary, an eleven-year-old cousin

of hers. The three of us talked pleasantly and listened to pop music for a few hours. At a moment, when the girl found out my age, she exclaimed in surprise: “You should be with a fiancé now, not here with Persa!”

I didn't say anything but deep inside I was agitated by the girl's spontaneous comment -for I knew she was right...

Phase Four: Days of Hope

Friday, 1st January 1988

Starting from today, I'll be keeping a regular diary so as to determine how full (or empty) my life is. Years pass by faster and faster, time seems to be slipping through my fingers, while I remain hopelessly stagnant. I seldom have anything to say to friends (of my sister), when the others can narrate lots of adventures. Apart from that, I feel oppressed by my home environment and I want to go away. Surely, I don't intend to grow old together with my parents.

For the time being, I have reasons to hope that my greatest dream will eventually come true: Ever since I was an adolescent, I have always wished to become a famous writer and the dream seems to be on the way to materialization now: Thanks to Chryssa, a cousin of mine who works in a big printing-office in Athens, my fantasy novel "The Conspiracy of Shadows" is in the hands of Mary Bonanos, chief editor of the publishing house Alba Nova.

Mary herself called me the other day, she assured me that my book is very good and that it has been approved by the renowned publisher Varnalis, who is the owner of Alba Nova! Since that day I have been waiting for her news about the publishing process. In the meanwhile, I have also started writing a second fantasy novel, titled "Nemesis".

Monday, 4th January 1988

This is the first day at work after Christmas vacations and I am bored to death. All those freakish cases on my

hands again! On the other side, work is a fine way to forget how hard and thankless life really is...

I spent the whole morning typing contracts and pre-invoices for the Dimoulas Wine Factory, although Mr Zafirakis doesn't hope to do this deal. Moreover, we were informed that the customer's factory caught fire on New Year's Day. "When it was raining luck, I was holding an umbrella" said Lucas bitterly. Finally, however, Mr Dimoulas called and confirmed his order.

When I arrived home at about seven in the evening, I found there Mrs Daphne and Persephone waiting for me. They gave me a pair of plastic earrings as a gift; not anything expensive, but it's the thought that counts. Anyway, Persa is the only person I know, who doesn't resent a meeting with me -even though sometimes I look down on her because she is eleven years younger than me...

Wednesday, 6th January 1988

It's the Epiphany today, and I expect it to be a rather boring holiday. The weather is painfully sunny, which makes me feel even worse, since there is no one to invite me to an outing. Moment by moment, I feel more and more depressed.

In the afternoon I got out and walked along the streets alone; anyway, there are no other entertainment alternatives for me. Moreover, nobody visited us today. As years go by, our house reminds me of a cemetery and I am trapped in it.

The highlight of the day: My father was absent for about three hours, I was left alone with my mother and we started a long conversation regarding the subject I hate most of all, which is my social isolation. This is all my fault, because I'm too frigid and I don't allow the others to approach me, says mum. She got on my nerves, I was

distressed, I yelled at her and then I went to my room.

I wanted to listen to some music so as to calm down, but mum rushed in furiously and shouted at me that I am a curmudgeon because I like sitting on a chair and listening to music...

Friday, 8th January 1988

I was working for Kyriakides this afternoon, when Zafirakis called and asked to speak to me. He was in a frantic condition and needed me to help him draw up a fax in Italian, because once again that jerk of Dimoulas had refused to sign the contract and he had demanded even more ridiculous terms of payment. I dictated via telephone the text for the Italian house “Tafel”, Lucas acknowledged my due and the colleague standing next to me was impressed by my knowledge of Italian.

So, it all boils down to this: I yearn for acknowledgment, it is great to be number one and admired by everybody. All the rest is cheap talk...

Saturday, 9th January 1988

Since I started working full time, I have been following a more “normal”, though tiresome routine: home-work-home! I also go to the gym two or three times a week, where I do body building.

I have also started to paint portraits of famous actors, actresses and singers, using pencil colours and markers. The result is better than I had expected.

As for the rest, there has been a rift between my parents and the Markakis family: Always claiming that my parents interfere in their family affairs, three months ago the couple decided to leave my sister's apartment and move to an outhouse in Argypolis. At least once a week, my

mother and I visit Alice and help her with the housework, while she acts the diva.

So, like every Saturday morning, mum and I visited Alice and helped her with the household chores today. Mum cleaned the kitchen and I babysat little Yanni. I took him in my lap and he told me that he would like to go to school and that he wants to marry Helen, his peer cousin. When I asked him “Do you want to be my husband?” he answered “I am your husband!”. Isn't he sweet?

In the afternoon aunt Pauline came over, together with uncle Alex, who is an air force officer. We had a heated discussion regarding the possibility of my getting a job in some public service. Uncle Alex warned me that in such places only informers and idlers prevail: “Where I work, if someone is conscientious they kick him out!” he said. In two words, I wouldn't stand a chance of surviving in there.

No, I won't apply for a position in any public service, as I initially intended to. Isn't my present job just fine? The people are nice there, they respect me and they appreciate what I do for the company. I don't think I can find a better working environment...

Tuesday, 12th January 1988

Another meaningless day in my life. Nothing exciting ever happens and maybe it's better this way. Let's not rush things. “Stay calm, do nothing. Spring comes, the grass grows by itself” (Zen philosophy).

The only extraordinary thing I did today was body building. There is a small problem, though: When I go to the gym, I see many handsome men there, but the only one who has noticed that I exist is a middle-aged, fat, paunchy, bald cretin, who never takes his eyes off me. Whatever I do, there he is, standing next to me, smiling foolishly! Only such

idiots like me, I want to kill myself!

Friday, 15th January 1988

Another hectic day at work. I spent countless hours typing stupidities on the computer. Once again I had to stay overtime, till 7:00 in the evening, because that lunatic of Dimoulas wanted to change the terms of payment, for the umpteenth time, although he has already signed the contract. This is getting ridiculous!

When I finally returned home, I found there Persa waiting for me. She asked me to paint a picture of eggs and chickens, which she will present as her own work at the lesson of Art. Then we exchanged books and I gave her an empty cassette, so that she can record some pop and rock songs for me.

Sunday, 17th January 1988

When I woke up this morning, I expected nothing but another boring day. However, a few hours later my parents and I were heading for Anavyssos, where I decided to buy a nice parcel of land, following an unexpected proposal of my godmother.

The said parcel of land seems to be a good opportunity: It is situated on a low hillside, it has a beautiful view, there is electric current and water supply. It belongs to a settlement called Galini, which is just a few kilometres away from Anavyssos. It costs 390.000 drachmas and I will have to pay 50.000 drachmas in advance. The rest will be paid off in bills, with my own money.

In the evening we were invited by Alice and Antony to dinner. My sister gave me the impression that she was jealous of my newly-bought land. As always, she wants everything for herself...

Monday, 18th January 1988

Another boring day at work. Mr Zafirakis started whining again about the future of the company -which, indeed, doesn't seem to be all roses: That psycho of Dimoulas keeps on cancelling one signed contract after the other. Another “good” customer, Mr John Kranas, always claims that he is destitute and he bargains over the beggarly provision of my boss for hours -what a niggard! To be more precise, he demands that Lucas imports his machinery without being paid a cent.

This morning Lucas was left no other alternative but lie to Kranas that he has borrowed two million drachmas so as to pay the staff! Great; The company I work for is always on the brink of bankruptcy...

Really, I have begun to wonder how all those big, multinational companies manage to stand: No matter what you do, no matter how clever and prudent you are, there are always imponderable factors that can destroy everything, any moment. Besides, the demanded efforts, pains and expenses are usually not worth the while, since the final earnings are generally too low...

Tuesday, 19th January 1988

Since she hasn't been in touch for weeks now, this morning I phoned Mary Bonanos and asked to make an appointment with Varnalis, just as she had advised me to. However, she told me I should wait one more month because, as she said, these days the publisher is snowed under with work because of a problem in the cover of a new book they have been preparing. *And for this reason an entire publishing house is paralyzed?*

The fact is that I've been waiting for a year now for

my book to be published, but my case remains suspiciously stagnant. I wonder if they have been pulling my leg all this time. If there is no progress until spring, I will submit my novel to other publishers as well.

Friday, 22nd January 1988

Mr Zafirakis was absent all day today, so I had to clear the spare parts of Malamos through the customs all by myself. Among the cleared goods there was a membrane too much. So, I notified the Italian house Derossi to send a telex regarding the free shipment of the membrane. Too much ado for nothing.

Late in the afternoon Persephone came over, with her drawing kit in hand. She said that her teacher was mad about the eggs and chickens I painted last Friday. She even considered the painting to be good enough for a coming European art contest, as long as I remake it in black and white -and sign it with Persa's name, of course. Needless to say, I couldn't say no.

Tuesday, 26th January 1988

Just like every day, this morning I met Louise Hoidas on the bus to work. Last night she took the initiative in inviting all our old schoolmates in a cafeteria in Glyfada, but she didn't let me know because she couldn't find my telephone number, she said. Nonsense; in all probability, she didn't want to find it.

The boss didn't appear in the office today and I spent the whole morning with Paul, our new mechanical engineer. He is 28 years old, he has studied in Bulgaria, he is not a trump, but: What a stupid, clueless boor! He isn't capable of carrying through any conversation, he is such a lazybones, he is constantly sleepy! When Lucas is absent, the bloke

spends all the working hours making innumerable successive phone calls to everybody! He never puts down the receiver! What a hysterical moron! I would like to fling a vase at his head! The boss is mad at him because he is unable to carry out the simplest task.

Yesterday Paul had to go to a factory in Piraeus and deliver some documents. However, he finally came back with the documents and claimed that he couldn't find the factory at the given address because it had vanished into thin air: "I looked this way, I looked that way, no sign of the factory!" he announced in confusion and Lucas flew off the handle. Nevertheless, that dead loss earns 80.000 drachmas per month while I, who actually run the company, earn no more than 50.000 drachmas, which is the basic salary.

Friday, 29th January 1988

This evening I went to the gym and exercised my legs and back. I also met Greta, a tall German who never stops trumpeting forth that Greeks are inferior to other Europeans. I also saw two familiar boys, I greeted them but I didn't manage to start a discussion with them. Once again I felt too shy -that mysterious sense which prevents me from communicating with people.

I wish I didn't have such sociability problems, but it seems they are a part of my nature. This is never going to change, unless a miracle happens.

On the other hand, neither the others seem to be in the mood for socializing with me: A little later, I was upset by a muscular guy who, as I was walking past, said to those surrounding him: "What's that comedy?". They all laughed...

Saturday, 6th February 1988

I don't know what's happening to me any more. I feel

like suffocating. Early this morning Persa called and demanded I should take her to three different malls in Athens, because she wanted to buy some music cassettes (can't she find them in a local store?). Moreover, she wanted to come over in the evening so that I help her with her homework. After hard negotiations, I managed to avoid the exhausting shopping spree. However, she turned up in the afternoon, I painted a stupid picture for her to show off at school, and she pestered the life out of me with her English homework.

A horrible day I spent with another miserable person, Persephone. Yet, the saddest thing is that there was no other way for me to spend Saturday evening. Who said that life is good? If there is nothing to hope for, then death is more preferable. I am sick and tired of waiting for a miracle! As about my writer's career, it's never going to happen, let's face it. Such successes are never meant for me. Whatever I try to achieve, it always starts with a promise for triumph and it ends with a flop...

With all these problems confronting me, I fear that something dreadful might happen to me in the future. I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be tormented anymore, I've suffered enough so far. What I wish now, is go to sleep tonight and never wake up again. I wish I could live for ever in one of those wonderful, vivid dreams I experience every night. Why do I have to return to this hostile world every morning, where I have no place at all?

Sunday, 7th February 1988

This evening my mother and I went to the theatre, where we watched a nice comedy. There were many famous actors, the play was funny and we had some laughs. Just what I needed...

I have also taken my decisions: Yesterday I was so sad that I feared getting sick. I intend never to let that happen again. It is not worth the while. First of all, I had better avoid people who make me feel miserable. Better no company than bad company. I'll never worry about my social life any more. The fact is that whenever I think about the others, I get upset, stressed, sad, desperate. I feel a lot better when I am alone. When I am "with company", I constantly feel rejected, confined, imprisoned.

All things considered, my life is fine! I don't have to satisfy anybody's whimses so as to be invited on a Saturday night outing. Happiness is to be in your element and my element is solitude. *The truth is that I am different from the other human beings. Hey, what a relief...*

Saturday, 13rd February 1988

This morning my sister and I visited our cousin Niki, who still lives in Glyfada. She has a husband and a cute three-year-old daughter now. Before long I engaged in argument with Mr know-all Constantine, Niki's husband: He insisted that success in life depends on intelligence and strong will, while I claimed that fate has the final word in everything.

"Losers say so," chuckled Constantine, who thinks he is super successful as an employee in aluminum works.

"Let's suppose you are right; can you tell me, please, why some people are intelligent and some others are not?"

Silence.

"Why do some people have a strong will, and some others don't?"

"But... we are having a conversation here, we aren't asking why this and why that all the time..." stuttered Constantine, who still couldn't find anything to answer back.

In all likelihood, it had never occurred to him before, that mental abilities depend on fate too...

Wednesday, 17th February, 1988

The boss has been absent since Monday, because he had to go to Crete for the installation of a labelling machine. At noon I was upset by a phone call from Dimoulas -how I hate phone calls! The bloke's demands are getting crazier and crazier. I phoned Lucas and let him know about it, but he started yelling that I was to blame for the preposterous ideas of Dimoulas. I'm just sick and tired of all that lunacy called "work".

Later, at the gym, I was extremely bored; besides, I heard the word "camel" uttered many times in a party of boys. I am not sure about what they meant, I don't care anymore, I just realize that my survival in such a hostile environment, for so many months, is a real achievement.

... Every night I return to my wonderful secret life in the world of dreams, where I can travel freely in paradox lands, full of brightness or haze, paradises or hells. There, in my night adventures, I am always the protagonist and I am never bored. I love and relish these spiritual trips more than any everyday experience. I won't get married. I won't sacrifice my night bliss for anyone...

Indignation

Monday, 29th February 1988

That was the last straw! I've been too long in this company! I am always obliged to assume responsibility for things I can't possibly know. The boss is constantly grumbling, he says that everything is on his hands, that "there is no organization in here" and that "other bosses never set foot in the office because their super secretaries do all the work by themselves!"

I abhor phone calls. I always have to give half answers and irritate the customers, since certain things are not supposed to be told. When Lucas is absent -and he is absent almost every day- I have to sub for him even if it isn't possible for me to know as much as he does.

This morning I made seven phone calls trying to find Mr Bouras in Argos and give him half an answer to a stupid question of his, just because I was afraid that Lucas would yell at me if I didn't. It's a bedlam in here!

At about 11:00 o'clock two strangers arrived at the office. They said they were from the National Bank of Greece and they asked to see some documents for the import of a bottling machine of Tsakiris. Without thinking twice, I showed them all the relevant books. Mrs Stasa was present, she probably suspected that something was wrong but she didn't say a word and didn't do anything to stop me. Both of us were feeling uncomfortable with all this but we didn't dare say "no" to those men, because we were afraid that Lucas would get angry if we didn't co-operate with them.

In the end, when Lucas arrived, it was proved that

showing the books to those people was the worst thing to do, because in this way the overvaluation of the bottling machine was found out. Naturally, I was to blame for everything. The boss fumed and fretted at me, screaming that I had just destroyed his company. I was terribly sad and got a terrible headache which will last till midnight.

I hate being a secretary: What a slavish, preposterous, indefinable yet irrationally demanding job! A secretary can never be sure where her responsibilities begin and where they end. Literally, the boss can demand anything from her! I suspect that most companies are actually run by (female) secretaries; of course (male) managers get all the money and the glory.

It's high time I started looking for another job. If I stay in Vinomec any longer, I will eventually get a nervous breakdown. Besides, all I can hope for in here is a basic salary, zero prospects and frightful tangles...

Tuesday, 1st March 1988

The accountant informed us that there is no need to worry: Lucas will get away with this by paying only a small fine. However, the customer is likely to get into big trouble. Let's just hope this story won't go far.

In the meantime Mr Raptis, the technician, didn't phone us to let us know that he arrived in Athens at 11:30, as expected, and we were worried about him. If he had had a car accident, for example, I would have been the one to blame -as Zafirakis told me with a serious face. I am looking forward to getting out of here.

Late in the afternoon I visited Persa, we listened to music and I asked her to record some foreign pop songs for me. I especially wanted the song "Alien" but, as I found out at home later, all the other songs were successfully recorded

except that one! How is this possible? I am the world champion of bad luck! If these simple plans of mine fail so ridiculously, what can I expect for the more important ones?

Wednesday, 2nd March 1988

It's a bedlam in here and I don't intend to go mad. The telephones are ringing like crazy, only the boss can answer certain questions but he is absent and the rest of us can do nothing but look at each other in embarrassment. There is so much work to do but there is no guidance. I feel like suffocating. The atmosphere in the office is getting more and more hostile against me. I can't bear it any longer.

Lucas is leaving for Italy in ten days and I'm worried already. I'm sick and tired of being responsible for a hundred things at the same time! I know: As soon as he is back, I will get a blasting because, according to him, "nothing was done right" and "some managers never set foot in the office because their super secretaries are capable of running the whole company by themselves!"

I strongly suspect that from now on I will always have to change jobs. Just one or two years in each company, then the atmosphere will become unbearable for me and I will take French leave. I will never be one of those who can brag: "I have worked thirty years in that company". I foresee that my life will be extremely difficult. Anyway, I have never been popular, successful, "clever", lucky -like most people are...

Saturday, 5th March 1988

This evening cousin Damian and his wife Anthia paid us a visit. They were both upset and kept complaining a lot about problems created by George, Anthia's brother: Not only has he disappeared from the garage owned by him and

Damian, but he's also asked for five million drachmas because he intends to open a taverna. George has already rented the place and bought all the equipment but he can't open the shop because there is a delay with the license. It seems that some shrewd people are ripping him off his money but he is too naive to understand. My cousin is very disappointed.

On the other hand, George has never been a balanced person: Eight years ago, when he was 24 years old, he fell in love with Clair, a nine-year-old girl, who is his wife now. Anthia is mad about her sister-in-law, considering her to be the root of all evil. According to Anthia, it is Clair who seduces George into inanities because she likes to act the superstar: she wants her husband to open that shop, so that she can play the guitar and sing for the customers. Anthia also claims that the young woman often goes out with different men but George always forgives her and takes her back home.

All this sounds very interesting, but I entertain some doubts: I know the girl, she is seventeen years old now, and she seems to be a quiet person -not a whore, as Anthia says. All at once, I remember Clair visiting us together with her husband a few years ago, when they were newly-weds: "I knew what was going to happen to me at the first night of marriage, because when I was nine years old someone raped me!" she had confided in my sister and me.

I was astonished when I heard the above but I didn't piece together all the information then: According to the known story, George first met his wife by chance, while he was in the army in Epirus. Although Clair was only nine years old at the time, George was infatuated with her and he waited patiently for her to turn fourteen, so that he could marry her. Well, I suspect that Mr George was the rapist and

that, in all probability, those two got married after a special agreement between the groom and the girl's parents: "You will marry our daughter and redeem her honour, and we shall keep our mouths shut..."

Monday, 7th March 1988

Tonight I dreamed of black snow. The phone call I got from Mary Bonanos early this morning, explained that ill-omened dream: Varnalis is not interested in my book, there is nothing else to do. Mary suggested I should go to other publishers and this is what I intend to do. Of course, deep inside I know there will be no result. Without any strings to pull, it will be like going on a wild goose chase. Yet, I ought to try...

In the evening Persephone came and asked me to paint a rather complicated picture of a living room, which she will present as her own work at the lesson of Art. I can't stand her endless demands anymore. Once she used to come for company as well, but now she only takes advantage of me. As about her mother, she keeps stringing us along saying that she will use some backstairs influence so as to get me a permanent job in the Tax Office. Moreover, every day she brings worn out dresses or skirts, all of them more than twenty years old, which my mother has to repair with her sewing machine.

Even aunt Barbara, one of my father's six sisters, who happened to be at our home tonight, realized that Persa (1.50 m high, 130 kilos) not only is too demanding but acts the vamp as well! Indeed, the meatball hardly paid any attention to me when I entered the living room; in fact, she scorned me as if I owed her a favour for her allowing me to help her with her homework! I won't tolerate this attitude any longer. I intend to get rid of her, as soon as possible...

Thursday, 10th March 1988

It's a miracle! I said a magnificent "no" -and I really enjoyed it- to Persa, who wanted me to paint those eggs and chickens again -for a third time! As she explained, she planned to send the picture to the European art contest not only in a black and white but in colour as well! The girl is raving mad! I hope she gets a zero in Art!

Later in the evening, as I was returning from the gym, just before reaching my neighbourhood, I saw a group of familiar boys gathered in Tempi street; I meet them almost every time I go to the gym, as if they were waiting for me there, and they always mock me one way or another. This time they sorted out a whole dialogue:

"Tassos, do you want her? I think you two are a good match!"

"She wears glasses, so do you!"

"She has a wart on her cheek, so do you!"

"She is a beanpole, so are you!"

"She has a scar on her nose and so do you!"

"Run after her, Tassos!"

Who is Tassos?

That's a mystery.

How did they notice so many details about me, in the dusk?

That's another mystery.

Wednesday, 30th March 1988

I got very angry today: I had the impression that dad would buy a video player for me, as he had promised, but the truth is he has no such intention. Uncle Alex is involved in this too: The two of them have searched high and low for the smallest prices in the market but they've messed up everything and they don't know what's what. The bitter truth

is that my parents are old now and they are not to be trusted about anything.

At dinner time dad started whining -as usual: he didn't like it at all when I announced that I will buy that video player by myself, with my own money. According to him, if I give 80.000 drachmas from the sum I have in the bank, we will go bankrupt. I can't bear my parents' endless misery any longer. I must leave home. I can't stay here and get old together with two wretched old people.

... The very next day, when I finish work, I will go to a nearby store and buy a fine video player with four heads, at a prize of 130.000 drachmas. Later, as soon as I reach home, I will rent and watch my first video film.

Saturday, 2nd April 1988

Early this morning mum and I went to Alice's home, so as to help her move house. She and Antony have just found an apartment which is newer, bigger and nicer than the old outhouse they have now. This time we had to work even harder than any other time, doing extra household chores for her Majesty: We had to fill up big boxes with stuff and carry them from one house to the other. Thank God the new house is only a ten-minute walk from the old one.

In the afternoon, as I was going for a walk, I happened to see Cleo -an old schoolmate from elementary school. For heaven's sake, she is getting uglier and uglier every day! Her face is manly and so are her arms, shoulders and legs: full of muscles, and this is not due to working out. Her body is more masculine than any man's! Of course, it is a common secret that she is a hermaphrodite, a girl with male genitals hidden inside; Cleo's mother herself has confessed that to my mother.

Nevertheless, that thing has been married, ever since she was sixteen, to a handsome, curly-haired, blue eyed guy! How is it possible that the lady-killer didn't notice any of Cleo's "deficiencies" and even agreed to marry her in record time? When it comes to me, for example, men notice every single detail about me and they disapprove of everything at once: My excessive height (1.75 m), my low weight (55 kilos), the hairs on my arms, the glasses I wear, the lack of mincing...

Sunday, 3rd April 1988

We had unexpected visitors today: It was uncle Harry, my father's cousin, with his wife and their two children. Nassia, their teenage daughter, told me about her recent trip to Nafplio. Then she told me about her school, which is full of drug addicts, sissies and lesbians. In order to avoid the drugs handed out in the refreshment room, a friend of hers brings an orange or an apple to eat at school every day. However, a few days ago, while she was out of the class during the break, a smart aleck opened her bag and injected a drug into her orange! Anyway, I really wonder how Nassia (and all the other pupils) manages to survive without any problems in such an environment...

In the afternoon I called on Alice so as to help her carry some things to her new house. As soon as she saw me she snorted, obviously annoyed. I also met Emmanuel and Mara there. The two of them are having a mad love affair this year: He is a middle-aged womanizer, married with three children, and he happens to be Antony's best friend. She is a stupid chick and my sister's best friend ever since they were schoolmates in gymnasium.

At a moment, Mara asked me to stay out and guard the television set; then she turned to little Yanni and said:

“You saw? I kicked her out!”. When they finally took the television away and I was allowed to enter the house again, the boy expressed his worry about me. Probably, he was the only one who was happy to see me.

Such situations get on my nerves. That superstar of my sister is constantly telling tales about me to her numerous friends, that's why they all look down on me. I must change environment if I want to see better days...

Tuesday, 5th April 1988

Early this morning Mr Zafirakis phoned and told me that he wouldn't come to the office before noon. He also said that in the afternoon he intended to go to Chalkis, together with Paul, so as to fix some wining machines.

Paul acted the fool. To give the devil his due, it is understandable that he prefers to lie low since he knows that after eight hours in the office there will be a lot more work for him to do in some factory in Chalkis, all night long. So, he spent his time making successive phone calls to hundreds of people, from 8:00 to 14:30, and then he got away. Just as well; I couldn't stand him any longer, he is a cipher. I would like to hurl an ashtray at his head.

As soon as Lucas arrived and didn't find our mechanical engineer in the office, he flew into a rage and began to swear loudly. “Since Paul is incapable of taking any initiative, maybe you should start telling him exactly what to do every day,” I advised him.

Wednesday, 13th April 1988

At about noon my cousin Chryssa called and we talked about my storm-tossed book. In her opinion, Mary Bonanos probably sabotaged it: “I suspect that idiot never gave it to Varnalis!”, she said. I think so too. Finally,

Chryssa suggested I should come in contact with other publishing houses, while she will give my novel to an agent she knows, a certain Mr Kotsonis, who can present it to some other publishers. I think the case is getting too complicated, but I still hope.

In the meanwhile, Persephone has disappeared for more than a month; that is ever since I refused to paint those eggs and chickens for a third time. Indeed, I don't know what's going on. I don't live in a desert. There are lots of people around me: parents, sister, numerous friends of my sister, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances at the gym, colleagues at work. However, nobody cares about me, nobody wants to be my friend, nobody proposes me a match. To all those people, I don't even exist. They only know how to give me advice like “You should develop your social life a little”. I, on the other side, keep on running high and low, desperately trying to find friends; yet, whatever I do, I am always an intruder in their midst. They all look on me either as a nuisance or as a poor thing...

Thursday, 14th April 1988

Another exasperating day at work: I received Tronchi's offer for Valasis Winery, however there is no authorization, and the letter of guarantee is written in French! Moreover, the name of our company isn't mentioned anywhere! For God's sake! As if that moron of Tronchi had never exported to Greece before!

I spent the whole morning running an office marathon: I typed the four-page offer to Valasis, I sent uncountable faxes and telexes to the Italian manufacturer instructing him how to correct the above mistakes, I coordinated various Italian companies with customs brokers and bank employees. Absolute madness! Needless to say, it

is impossible to finish today and this means that tomorrow, when Lucas returns from Santorini, he will be furious at me. I'm fed up with all this lunacy!

Friday, 15th April 1988

One more marathon day at work, striving to carry out an enormous number of tasks. Moreover, the bank put me through the mill before preparing the letter of guarantee from Tronchi. Finally, I received the document just at the last moment, while the bank employee was grumbling vexed. I hate banks and public services. All those who work there are nothing but useless idlers.

In the afternoon, my parents and I were invited by Bill and Judith, who have rented our first floor. They are getting married on Sunday. A little later, the nuptial bed was made. I was surprised to see that there was only a white sheet and two pillows on the bed. Their baby, the eight-month-old Constantine, was very sweet and slept most of the time. Is Bill rather jumpy, or what?

Some relatives of Judith were present as well; they all arrived this morning from New Zealand and they will stay in Greece for a week. I communicated with them in English, especially with Judith's mother and two other ladies. Sometimes I had a little difficulty in understanding them because they are used to speaking between their teeth, but all of them were pleasant, polite and friendly. Paradoxically, I felt quite comfortable among them: I wasn't shy and reserved as usual, neither did I wonder once what I should say to look interesting and cute.

They all seem to be calm and happy with their lives in New Zealand: It's a prosperous country, most people live on nice farms in a natural environment and they have their own swimming pools too. The jobless get an unemployment

allowance for years if needed (not just for nine months, as in Greece), until they find a new position.

In the end, they invited me to spend my summer vacations on their farm. I was astonished at their kindness, I liked the idea but I don't think I will go. I hardly know them...

Saturday, 16th April 1988

Despite my nasty cold which is getting worse and worse, this morning my mother and I left home and called on Alice. We hardly stayed there for half an hour, because Alice had a long face and kept calling me “faulty” again and again. Then mum commented that I had forgotten to remove some hairs from my chin and my dear sister got angry: “Really, can't you see anything else that's ugly about her?”

We finally went off hastily because Alice was looking forward to visiting one of her friends. As we were walking down the street, it started raining cats and dogs and we were chilled to the bone. I don't intend to visit Alice ever again. She always finds something better to do than keep me company. She only wants us to serve her and then hit the road. I won't tolerate this attitude anymore. Enough is enough.

In the evening Persephone arrived unexpectedly and asked me to paint some crazy eggs again. I finished the work of art within a quarter of an hour. Then, we had a pleasant discussion till late at night. Among others, we talked about certain mini singers, 15 or 16-year-old girls who have been mushrooming in show business lately but they are bound to disappear next year...

Sunday, 17th April 1988

In the evening my father and I went to Judith and

Bill's wedding. The bride arrived at the church of St Tryfon in a carriage but she didn't get off at once; she had to wait for a while, until the groom showed up at 7:00 o'clock sharp, which was the set time of the wedding.

I held the baby in my lap for a few minutes but he wouldn't stop crying. Mrs Voula, who has rented our apartment on the second floor, took him in her hands and managed to calm him down. "She knows how to do it," said the bride's mother smiling.

When the ceremony was over, we returned home on foot. Mrs Voula, her husband and their teenage son went to the wedding reception, just like all the other guests. Only my family was not invited. Why, indeed? I thought we were in good terms with Judith and Bill...

Friday, 22nd April 1988

Calvary at work: Once again, the buses were on strike. I managed to arrive at the office half an hour late, that is at 8:30. Luckily, Lucas had not come yet. Mr Rossini of Tafel phoned and suggested his sending a technician to Christides Winery in the beginning of May. I notified the customer, but he insisted the technician should come on the 9th or 10th of May. I phoned Mr Rossini and informed him about it. After a while Mr Christides called again, I assured him that I had just arranged everything according to his wishes, but he burst out all nerves:

"9th or 10th of May? What are you talking about, miss? It will be too late then! On the 3rd of May, at the latest, the technician must be here!"

"But you told me..." I tried to protest, but the bloke hang up and I had my hackles up. *What shall I tell the Italians now?* I wondered, full of worry.

Finally, the manufacturer Tafel sent a telex, where I added on the spot that everything was ready for the technician to come on the 3rd of May at the latest. After a while Mr Christides called again and ordered me not to do anything until he spoke with Lucas. He is a madcap!

When the boss came at last, I narrated the whole story to him, he phoned Mr Rossini at once and the Italian congratulated him on me. Then, for half an hour or more Lucas ran Paul down, saying that he is nothing but a dead loss. In the end, I had to work three hours overtime in order to finish all the necessary work and the boss gave me 2000 drachmas “so as to drink his health”.

Saturday, 23rd April 1988

Like every Saturday morning, my mother and I visited Alice and helped her with the housework. This time my sister was worried because she had arranged a get-together of friends for this evening. The problem was that Koko, her parrot, had escaped from his cage and made himself comfortable on the sofa. I approached and extended my finger, so that he could jump on it, but as soon as I got near, Koko was terrified and started flying around the living room.

Yanni got a good spanking because he took off his blouse and threw it off the balcony. A little later he disposed of a teddy bear as well. Alice asked me to babysit him for a while because she wanted to go to the shops and buy stuff. The boy drove me hard and he almost jumped off the balcony. When Antony came, he managed to catch the bird by throwing cushions at it.

Later, in the evening, the guests started arriving: Emmanuel, the middle-aged lady-killer, and Roula, his stupid girlfriend: she wants to get rid of him but he threatens

to stab her, she says; cousin Niki with her husband; Antony's sister, with her always broke but haughty husband; Dennis, Antony's best friend, with his fiancé. As usual, everybody ignored me systematically, until I was left all alone, crouched in a corner. When I dared say something to Alice, she gave me a malignant look and snapped at me: "We were kind enough to invite you! Now, if you aren't having a good time, we don't give a dime!"

Tuesday, 26th April 1988

The long-awaited settlement of Pavlides ended in a fiasco, just like I had imagined: On the invoices the Italians had written "Delivery Ex Works" instead of "Delivery CIF". I moved heaven and earth in order to make the Italians understand how to draw up the correct invoices. Then I had to get an order confirmation from the customer -everything in record time.

However, those shrewish hens in the bank didn't accept the order confirmation, because they never move a finger after 11:30 and I brought them the document at 12:00. When I finally finished, the time was 12:05 -too late. I hate banks. I hate hens. I hate this job.

Later on, I had to go to the Tax Office and submit some VAT statements which were not accepted because, according to the sleepy public servant, "everything is wrong here!"

In the afternoon, when spirits had calmed down a little, I confided some of my ideas in Lucas: For example, he could make questionnaires regarding wining machines and give them to his customers. He smiled and told me I should be doing Paul's job. "You are the best mechanical engineer this company has ever had," he admitted. But he said nothing about a raise...

New Horizons

Saturday, 30th April 1988

A day of action: I spent the whole morning going from publisher to publisher, leaving a copy of my novel "The Conspiracy of Shadows" to each one of them. This first contact brought no encouraging results: The great majority of publishers didn't even deign to have a look at my book because they are snowed under with work, as they told me. Some others acted the idealists, claiming that they publish only meaningful books, after careful selection.

Mr Marris, one of the most famous publishers in the country, was sincere enough to tell me that he never publishes books of new writers; he does business with recognized authors exclusively.

"My novel is good," I insisted.

"No doubt, there are thousands of good books, but we don't publish good books we publish books that are in vogue!"

"My book is in vogue, too!" I went on undaunted.

"It can't be in vogue, because you are not famous!"

"Thanks for your time!" I said and left.

He didn't give me any hope, but I recognized his frankness.

Later, following my father's instructions, I went to find another publisher called Tsalikis; I've never heard of him but dad says he is an old friend of his from Lixouri. When I arrived at the given address, I was surprised to see that there was a patisserie there. I asked to see Mr Tsalikis and they sent me next door, which proved to be a clothes shop. I returned to the patisserie and they finally informed me that Mr Tsalikis is on a business trip to Italy. Obviously,

the bloke has nothing to do with books.

Sunday, 1st May 1988

Today my family and I went on an organized day trip to Saint John the Russian, in Euboea, together with uncle Harry, his wife and their daughter, Nassia. It was an enjoyable trip along wooded mountain sides and green fields. However, I was exasperated by a paranoid old man who, during the whole journey, went near the coach driver again and again, took the microphone in his hands and made ridiculous speeches or told insipid jokes with his nasty, clarion voice.

When we arrived at the church of Saint John the Russian at last (my ears!), the whole group went to bow before the saint's relics and his belt, which is believed to cure illnesses. His face is covered because the faithful used to bite it and take the pieces as a talisman. *People are crazy...*

We had lunch in a local tavern and then we played volleyball with Nassia and some other young people from the group. Volleyball is my favourite sport but I seldom have the chance to play. After that, my cousin and I went for a walk in the green, flowery village of New Prokopion and we talked about many interesting subjects, such as the oppression of women in the modern society, where a woman is considered to be finished unless she is married by thirty.

I had a very nice time while we were in the village; however, on the way back home I got really indignant at the old cretin, who made us listen to his prehistoric cantatas for hours, while he was singing along! Someone tried to protest but the moron paid no heed at all. Strangely enough, nobody else dared say another word to him.

As I found out at the next stop, it was bad luck that had led my mother and me to the wrong coach. My father and his relatives were in the other coach, where nice pop and rock songs were heard and the atmosphere was more pleasant.

When we reached Athens, I (and all the other passengers, I think) had almost had a nervous breakdown because of the nasty prehistoric songs and the unstoppable, psychotic verbal diarrhoea of the cretin. I wonder, though: How is it possible that nobody reacted dynamically during all those horrible hours? Why do people submit themselves so easily to any nutcase who acts the leader?

Tuesday, 10th May 1988

My whole life condensed in a day: There was a frightful commotion at work, because I had to arrange the arrival of Italian technicians at the factory of Christides in Yannena. At the same time I had to persuade Derossi and Meltec to send the invoices for Dimoulas in time.

At about 4:20, while Meltec was acting the fool, the customs broker phoned and demanded I should send the Dimoulas invoices by coach no later than this afternoon -which is impossible, because the last coach to Argos (where the customer's winery is) leaves at 5:00 and the coach station is too far from Vinomec. Despite my successive faxes, Meltec had sent nothing until 5:00 o'clock and I got hysterical.

Later, at home, while I was getting ready to have my meal, I noticed that mum was watching me closely.

“Eat some bread!” she cried suddenly.

I reached for the bread but before I touched it...

“Eat some cheese!”

I reached for the cheese but before I touched it...

“Eat some salad!”

I reached for the salad but before I touched it...

“Eat some of your food, now! Haven't you had enough junk?”

“Mum!”

“What is it now?”

“Get off my back! Go and watch some television! Now!”

“I want to die, so that you will get rid of me!” she muttered and got away.

Later, when I went to the gym, I felt terribly alone. Greta was not there, she has disappeared for months now. There was nobody else to talk to and I got bored. Moreover, as I was returning home, one of the bums in Tempi street (who give me the impression they are always on the look-out for me) called me “giraffe”. I would be happy if he fell down and broke his leg.

Friday, 13th May 1988

Incredible but true: Dimoulas has a fax machine in Argos but he told us so only this morning! All that agony and frantic run with his stupid invoices was nothing but a fool's errand! The bloke is a lunatic! But that wasn't all: There is also another problem with the Tafel labelling machine, which will arrive at the port of Piraeus instead of Loutraki. I just hope this ends well; if anything goes wrong, I will be the one to blame for mistakes made by the Italians.

At noon I phoned Mr Kotsonis, I introduced myself and told him about my novel. He seemed happy for my phone call, he explained that he is a writer himself and that he keeps contact with many famous publishing houses. However, he pointed out that I am not likely to find a publisher who will publish my book on his own expenses; most probably, I will be asked to pay a certain amount of

money. He showed an interest in my novel, but there was something I didn't like in his expressions: "I will bend over it (he means my book) with love" ... "I like the Ionian islands but the increasing tourism has resulted in the prostitution of their inhabitants" (twice). Finally, we arranged an appointment for Tuesday evening.

Later, in the evening, Persa dropped by because she wanted me to make a painting of fish for her. I finished it in a quarter of an hour. Aunt Pauline, who happened to be present, sought to tease her: She told us about two sisters for whom she used to embroider when she was a schoolgirl. The sisters always got full marks in housekeeping, but if the teacher made them embroider in class, they would put their foot in it. Persephone made a wry face but she pretended she hadn't taken the hint.

Tuesday, 17th May 1988

Right after work, I met Chryssa downtown and we both headed for the bookshop of Chris Kotsonis, in Pagrati. When we arrived there, I was impressed by the rustic furniture and the great number of arty books put on three long shelves they will hardly ever leave.

We sat on a nice sofa made of logs and covered with patchwork rugs. Right from the first moment, the guy was very friendly and he gave each one of us a copy of his last book, "The Unknown City", as a gift. He also gave me a collection of his poems titled "Brief Gleanings", which I must return in due time.

Chris is about forty, single, an ex rebelled youth, one of those who think they have avoided compromise. Answering his questions, I told him that I have been writing stories ever since I was a child but "The Conspiracy of Shadows" is my first novel. I also told him I read Greek and

foreign literature, mostly books that give information or teach something.

“This is what I do too, but in this way you eventually obtain nothing, and you don't enjoy reading either. I have read thousands of books; if I had kept something from each one of them, I would be a wise man now,” he retorted.

I went along with that, although I'm not so sure that I agree.

Finally, he assured me that he will read my book carefully and see that it is published. We shall also give it to journalists and get some reviews. I will probably have to pay for a part of the publishing expenses, while the publisher will undertake the distribution of the book. Linotype costs much less than phototypesetting and we'll prefer it, since the result will be the same.

A little later, a guy and his girlfriend showed up. As soon as he saw them, Chris greeted them warmly and remembered the good old times after the political changeover of '74, when lots of people went in and out of his shop and revolutionary books were in vogue.

When we finally left the shop, Chryssa confided in me that Kotsonis struck her as a nice person, though a little overreacting.

“He will be impressed at your book,” she concluded smiling.

“Sure he will; but I don't know if it will be a positive or a negative impression; he is an arty guy, you see,” I joked.

Sunday, 22nd May 1988

I spent the whole morning with my little nephew, because his parents are on a day trip to Aegina and my mother has gone to the funeral of aunt Diamanta. At first we watched some stupid animated cartoons on television, but most of the time the kid was a handful: We played football for more than an hour, he wet his pants, he wanted to see my

breasts, he sought to get out of the bedroom window.

All at once, Yanni showed me a bag full of toys and told me with a cunning look: "Take these toys to the kitchen!". I did him the favour but as soon as I got back to the living room, just a second later, the boy had vanished into thin air! I looked under the bed but he wasn't there. However, the window was open, so I supposed he had sprang through it into the yard. I got out of the house, I searched the yard, but the boy was nowhere to see. I called his name again and again, nothing. I rushed into the street, I ran to the nearest crossroads, nothing.

Almost mad with worry, I returned to the yard, still calling his name. Right then, I heard a voice from heaven: "Auntie, I am up here!" I raised my head and saw the boy standing on the terrace of our three-storeyed house! Apparently, the door which leads upstairs had not been well closed, so the kid just pushed it and entered the stairwell.

I ran to the terrace at the double, I grabbed Yanni by the hand, I took him down immediately and I gave him a good old spanking. I really wonder about all these women who fancy raising children. I don't think this lifestyle is right for me...

Tuesday, 24th May 1988

In the afternoon I called on my sister because she wanted me to meet Vangelis: He is one of Antony's cousins, he lives in Crete and he will stay in Glyfada for a few days. We waited and waited but the bloke was nowhere to see. Finally, Alice left me alone in the sitting room and dropped by Vangelis' uncle, who lives nearby, so as to find out what had happened to the would-be groom.

In the end, the young man rang the doorbell at 8:30, and he informed us that he had come earlier, at about six

o'clock, but oddly enough the bell hadn't rung. *Was that bad luck or what?*

As soon as I stepped into the living room and saw him, I felt a strange embarrassment -probably because Alice didn't go to the trouble of introducing us. We just said "hello" and that was all. A little later, when I followed my sister into the kitchen, she put on a disdainful look and admonished me for not mincing enough. "You were just standing there, like a gawk!" she said sharply.

A few minutes later, Antony came home together with three video tapes, two of his friends and their girlfriends. He closed the French windows and we all sat and watched all three films, one after the other; as a result we couldn't utter a word. Vangelis proved to be an agreeable guy. He doesn't like video films so much, he said, I don't like them either. He is tall, thin, good-looking, a little dark-skinned -I could hardly discern his features in the darkness of the living room. So much of a match-making...

Alice and I soon got bored and we went out for a walk. We took little Yanni with us but he was very naughty and he made a scene because the ice cream we bought him was too small, as he complained.

Suddenly, Alice remembered she had not gone to the birthday party of cousin Niki's daughter two days ago, and she was worried that Niki might be angry at her. So, she turned to me and ordered: "On your way home, call on Niki and tell her that I am terribly sorry for the negligence and that I will drop by tomorrow and wish many happy returns". Needless to say, I didn't do anything like that. Alright, my parents and I have landed ourselves in a mess serving Her Majesty the Queen Alice, but ludicrousness has a limit...

Sunday, 27th May 1988

At about noon I phoned Chris Kotsonis and he announced happily the following: "Your book is fine, it has many good points but you could abridge it a little. You should have it published though, and for heaven's sake, don't stop here, write more books, better ones!". Then he said he had already found "a very important and willing publisher" who, however, will ask for my contribution in the expenses.

When I called Chryssa and told her about it, she agreed: "Don't turn down the proposal. My boss will undertake the type-setting and we'll offer you a discount". I am beginning to like the idea.

Saturday, 28th May 1988

Early this morning mum got on my nerves because, as usual, she started finding faults with me: "Don't put on the red blouse, it shows off your wry shoulders" ... "The yellow on shows off your wry back" ... "You've lost weight, you look terrible!".

All things considered, she is a deviously oppressive woman. Ever since I was a kid she has been scolding me for anything, criticizing whatever I do and depriving me from any initiative, even in the simplest matters.

Alice dropped by at noon, she had lunch with us, I told her about the above incident and she agreed that our mother is wayward and pushy, especially towards me. "You certainly don't let Yvonne take any initiative," she said to mum. Paradoxically, my sister has escaped her influence: mum never tells her how to do this or that maybe because, for some strange reason, she never fears that Alice could ever do anything wrong...

Tuesday, 31st May 1988

I worked with Kyriakides till late in the evening because I had to type some stupid ten-page contracts, plus the rest of the correspondence. Then he offered to give me a ride home but he annoyed me a little because he sought to prove that I never go out with friends: “How is it possible, that you haven't planned anything for tonight? Don't you have a love affair?” he asked suspiciously. No matter how hard I tried to convince him about the opposite by telling him fibs, for example that I often go out with friends and that I just happened to stay in tonight, he still insisted on his story. What does it matter to him, anyway?

When I arrived home, I was informed that Alice had just found a job: After her mother-in-law's mediation, who has been working as a chambermaid in the luxurious hotel Blue Rose in Vouliagmeni for many years, tomorrow Alice starts work as a chamber-maid in the same hotel. She will have to work for eight to ten hours every day, she isn't sure whether she will have any days off during the whole summer, nevertheless she is very pleased.

Thursday, 2nd June 1988

This afternoon Mr Kotsonis and I had an appointment with Mr Kourtakis, owner of the publishing house Evagoras. As I found out soon, this company is a “ghost”: It consists of one dusty room only, it has no sign, it doesn't appear in the yellow pages, and its owner didn't even have a business card to give me. Anyway, what I heard today had nothing to do with what Kotsonis had been telling me lately: They want me to pay all the publishing expenses, and they won't even distribute the book because the great company consists of two persons only. Kourtakis also made clear that he won't put the name of his house on my novel, because a serious

scholar like him doesn't put the name Evagoras on any insignificant book.

In the end, I told them I would think about it for a couple of days, but I don't foresee any agreement with them. Anyway, both of them struck me as two cunning skint blokes who are desperately looking for pennies...

Friday, 3rd June 1988

In the afternoon, right after work, I went to Evagoras again and gave my final answer. As soon as Kourtakis heard that I was not prepared to pay for the publishing of my novel, he started trembling of fear! Then he put on an air of profundity and announced that he is not interested in my book because it looks like a soft cover mainstream novel (I bet the nitwit wishes he could write something like that) and a “serious” publishing house like the invisible Evagoras doesn't publish such books.

The fact is that Kotsonis put his foot in it; moreover, when I called him in the evening, he wanted to make something of it: “Who do you think you are, to have such demands? I was more bashful when I was having my first book published,” he reprimanded me. That was it: I am never going to get in contact with those two morons again.

Circle of Promises

Saturday, 4th June 1988

I have already seen dozens of publishers all over Athens, and most of the times the results were rather disappointing: The majority of them didn't even deign to have a look at my book, some others thought it were too big (155 pages), someone found it “nice, publishable, not a masterpiece, but there is nothing to do now because our schedule is full till the end of next year”.

This morning I went to Danae Publishing, which is one of the most famous houses in the country. The editor returned the book to me, after having kept it for a month, together with a written review: “Interesting style of writing. Your novel has many influences but it is quite original”. She spoke to me in a friendly manner, she called me by my name, but she suggested I should go to other publishers, since they can't publish it because their schedule is full till the end of next year (the usual story). “Don't you have any acquaintances in the publishing industry?” she concluded with a meaningful smile.

Mr Kosmides, another famous publisher, didn't wish to see my novel, yet he was very sincere to me: There is no way to have it published without paying, science fiction and fantasy are not in vogue any more, only renowned authors survive even if they write nonsense. He also told me that Varnalis is unapproachable, since he is the closest to the prime minister. I guess Mrs Bonanos had been stringing me along for one whole year...

I have been given some hope by the publishing house “Faesilie”: The friendly, bearded publisher has already read and approved of my novel, yet he has been postponing the signing of the contract month after month. His chief editor has talked to me on the phone, he said he found my novel very interesting, he made some correct remarks and he also stated that “The Conspiracy of Shadows” belongs to the genre of fantasy, it is not science fiction.

Yet, the most hopeful case is another publisher named Halaris, who has also approved of my book and told me we shall sign a contract by the end of next year. For the time being all I have is promises, but I am waiting patiently, full of optimism...

Sunday, 5th June 1988

This afternoon I paid a visit to cousin Chryssa and we talked about that cipher of Kotsonis. Then two of her friends arrived and we all went to a cafeteria in the Areos Park. I think I'll get along well with these people.

We were chatting cheerily, when all at once Chryssa asked me about my book. I informed her that I have been to many publishers, that two of them are interested in publishing my novel till the end of next year, and that I will prefer the one who will sign the contract first. Everybody seemed to be impressed.

“Shall we see you again?” they asked me later, while I was leaving.

“Of course!” I replied smiling.

On the way home, a nice young man came and sat next to me in the bus. Before long he started talking to me and I was surprised at his interest in me. His name is Michael, he is 24 years old and he is a publisher! He is rather plump, with big buttocks, not quite my type, but he

has a beautiful face. He said that his company is quite successful, with a staff of 50 employees, and that he was going to the Book Fair at Syntagma Square in order to find new collaborators.

Finally, we went to the fair together. I bought a book of fantasy stories, while he was talking to a group of managers. "This is how you earn 4000 drachmas a day," he bragged a little later. I suspect he is just a peddler who tries to hit on chicks by acting the rich publisher.

When we arrived at the bus terminus at Zappeion, he isolated me at a bench and kissed me. I think he is very hasty and he says big words like "You kiss nicely, Yvonne". Is this just hot air, or what?

Tuesday, 7th June 1988

This morning my mother and I went to the Lyceum of St Tryfon, so as to make some original copies of my graduation certificate. Probably I will need them while searching for a better job. However, due to a mistake of mine, the master in charge couldn't validate the photocopies, so our going there was a waste of effort.

My mother took the occasion to express all her disappointment in me: "We are always complaining about our bad luck, but we say nothing about our stupidity!". Next moment she touched the left side of my back, which protrudes slightly because of my scoliosis, and said bitterly: "Your back is wry, you need exercise!". Then, she touched my right shoulder, which is a little lower than the left one. "Lift your shoulder, don't let it droop!" she went on grimly. At that moment I realized that my mother wishes she had another daughter, someone beautiful and popular; not me...

In the afternoon I set out for the gym, although I was feeling very gloomy. As soon as they saw me walking down

the road, the familiar bums of Tempi street started making fun of me: “Hey, you! Giraffe! You, camel!”. They wouldn't stop deriding me, so I turned my head back and shouted at them: “You are sissies, all of you!” Paradoxically, they all shut up at once.

Sunday, 19th June 1988

It's two weeks now since I met him, and Michael hasn't communicated with me yet. So, I decided to make the big step and call him first. We arranged an appointment for this afternoon and we went on a walk in the National Gardens. He kissed me three times with his fleshy lips and it felt nice; yet, he made me wonder because every now and then he dropped certain hints: “Here are your relatives!” (outside the cage of the goats), or “Here are your cousins!” (near the enclosure of the donkeys). In the beginning I took it as a joke, but when I told him something similar outside the cage of the monkeys, he didn't like it at all.

A little later I asked him to give me the telephone number of his workplace but he refused:

“I've already given it to you and told you not to call me there!” he said.

“Really? You've told me all this and I don't remember?” I replied ironically.

Finally, we sat at a table in the outdoor cafeteria inside the National Gardens, where we chatted for about an hour. I wouldn't mind another date with him but as we were getting ready to leave, Michael told me cunningly:

“I'm afraid I haven't taken enough money with me and I need a taxi urgently; could you lend me a thousand drachmas?”

“I don't have so much money with me,” I answered calmly.

“Four hundred drachmas?”

“No, I'm sorry...”

It was crystal clear to me that the bloke wanted me to pay for his coffee too, but I didn't do him the favour.

No sooner had that torrid love affair ended, than another began: As soon as I arrived at Zappeion Park, I happened to cross another bloke: It was a tall, thin man with brown hair and short quiffs on his forehead. He stopped me and asked me to go for a coffee with him right away. I accepted immediately, because he was not ugly and he looked like a gentleman; besides, I wanted to be sociable and willing for new experiences.

We entered a nearby cafeteria at once and the first introductions were made. His name is Constantine and he works as a teacher. We chatted pleasantly for an hour or so, he seemed to be more refined, polite and educated than Michael, he even showed interest and understanding about the difficulties of my job: “Don't worry about work; work is never over, Yvonne,” he advised me calmly.

Sunday, 26th June 1988

This afternoon I met Constantine again. This time we went to the outdoor cafeteria in Zappeion Park. At first, everything was fine. He seemed decent and “harmless”, and all we did was talk about various subjects of common interest. However, after half an hour he told me smiling: “We must come closer to each other! If we go on like this, the other people here will think we have quarrelled!” So, we came closer and held hands, arm-in-arm. A few minutes later he suggested we go for a walk together -in fact he insisted a lot on that. I agreed because I wanted to show good will and adaptability. How could I imagine what awaited me?

During our walk along Amalias Avenue, the bloke didn't take his hands off me -not even for one moment! He

kept me captive right in front of him, in a most unnatural way, so that his body was stuck to mine while we were walking. In fact, I could hardly walk, while everybody was staring at us. I didn't dare say anything because nothing like that had ever happened to me before and I didn't know how to react. Besides, I didn't want him to put me down as an iceberg -even if every moment was torture to me.

Only when we arrived at the bus terminus at Zappeion, did I ask him to behave himself. He partly conformed to my wish but he kept on holding my hand, making sure that it touched his penis! I didn't protest any more; I just had patience until we reached the bus.

Needless to say, I don't intend to meet this pervert ever again. I only wonder: Is this what happens any time a girl goes out with a guy? "This is what all men do, and most women like it!" confirms my sexually expert sister. But how can women tolerate being treated like this? I just can't understand...

Saturday, 2nd July 1988

This is the fourth weekend in a row that I have phoned my cousin Chryssa and asked her we meet on one of the two days; yet, she has been frigid towards me and avoided seeing me, with various excuses. I feel depressed because I know we shall never go out together again and I can't figure out why. Just when I thought I had found a normal, enjoyable party of friends... Why isn't Chryssa interested in me any more?

In the afternoon aunt Penelope paid us a visit. At a moment I said something she didn't approve of; she pointed at the coffee I was drinking and burst out at me: "That's why you will go mad in the end, and you won't be able to tolerate the slightest noise! Even a fly will get on your nerves!"

At first I was taken aback at what aunt had just said, but then I laughed and told her that I don't have a problem with noise. She didn't answer, but she glanced at me again with her enigmatic, piercing eyes, as if she were saying: "Yeah, sure, just wait and see..."

Saturday, 16th June 1988

Due to lack of company (as usual), this morning I decided to go alone to the beach of Voula. I was swimming in the shallows when a dark-skinned guy approached me and started courting me. I didn't like him so much, he looked like an Arab, he swam like a frog, and he was always in my way. However, I pressed myself to be friendly and receptive; years go by fast, I am not twenty years old and I can't be choosy any more. With his broken Greek, he told me that his name is Omar, he comes from Egypt and he works in the embassy. I considered it wise not to reveal my true identity: I told him that my name is Mary and that I live in Kallithea. His face lit up because he lives in Kallithea too, as he told me.

While we were getting out of the water, the bloke wanted to hold hands with me, as if we were lovebirds. "You are in my heart from the first moment I saw you, Mary!" he announced histrionically. He treated me to a glass of iced coffee, we talked quietly for a while and we finally arranged to meet at a cafeteria in Kallithea three days later. As I was leaving the beach, Omar said to me: "No lies, Mary, alright? No lies!"

Tuesday, 19th July 1988

Although I wasn't really in the mood for it, I did my best to go to the appointment on time, although it was exhausting for me: Like every weekday, I had to work for

eight hours at the office, which is in New Smyrna. When I returned home, I hardly had any time to take lunch and rest for half an hour; then I had to take two buses, so as to meet Omar in Kallithea at 7:30, as agreed. However, I waited there for forty-five minutes but the would-be groom didn't show up. Strangely enough, I didn't feel bad about it; in fact, I was relieved...

Saturday, 23rd July 1988

I was naive enough to go to the same beach which is, by the way, quite big and crowded. Omar popped up in front of me again and asked me the reason why I stood him up on Tuesday. I pretended I didn't know him and told him he was making a mistake, while I was trying to get out of the water. Once again he was in my way and didn't let me swim out. I started to get annoyed and he started losing his temper. "Don't be nervy, Mary" he exclaimed at a moment.

Finally, I managed to get out of the sea and lay down on the sand in order to sunbathe. A few seconds later he passed by me, he called me "nitwit", I called him "stupid", and that was the end of another love story. I don't intend to go to that beach alone again...

Tuesday, 16th August 1988

Just as I was wondering why relatives and friends never propose a match to me, uncle Alex dropped by this afternoon and announced that he had just met a guy who's Mr Right for me: He has seen him at the seaside three times, he is a dark-skinned Muslim Arab, and he is desperately looking for a bride! Uncle Alex told him about me and the Arab said that if I wanted him to marry me, I should leave everything behind, go to Saudi Arabia with him and become a Muslim! "He must be rich, though!" wound up uncle Alex.

My mother was very enthusiastic about this, she urged me to meet the bloke as soon as possible but I refused flatly. I am not at all in the mood of getting involved with a Muslim and buried in a harem...

Wednesday, 17th August 1988

It was late in the afternoon when my mother and I decided to go for a walk together. Who did we meet twenty minutes later, as soon as we turned into Pellis st.? Uncle Alex! Right at that time he was driving up the road, having just returned from the beach! *Is this diabolic coincidence or what?* I wondered. Uncle Alex claimed that our meeting was fateful and that I was meant to meet the groom from Arabia right away! "Every day at this hour he is sunbathing at Diamond Beach! Especially this evening, he will be waiting for us!" he concluded, full of excitement.

My mother, jumping for joy, agreed immediately that fate was leading me to... Saudi Arabia. I tried to protest but nobody was listening to me. So, we got into uncle's car, he reversed direction and we headed for the seaside.

However, when we finally reached Diamond Beach, the groom was nowhere to see! *Phew! That was close!* Yet, uncle Alex and mum wouldn't get daunted so easily. They insisted on our waiting there for a while, in case Prince Charming showed up. We stayed there for half an hour but nothing like that happened. We got on the car and returned home, while my mother could hardly hold back her tears.

Thursday, 13th October 1988

As I was returning from work by bus, I happened to meet Kate, an old schoolmate of mine, with whom I used to keep company (as boring as can be) while we were in lyceum. I was astounded to hear that she has been married to

a famous footballer for five years now! She has two children and she works in the Tax Office, where she was hired as soon as she finished high school.

“I met Lena by chance, a few months ago,” she also informed me. “She is married too, and if you see her husband, you will drop dead! He is just gorgeous! As about her, she has lost weight and she is very beautiful. Moreover, she has a permanent job in the Social Security Insurance Foundation!”

Really now, isn't this odd? The most boring girls in the school, always stuck in a corner, parroting the lesson again and again, are now married to handsome and successful men, and they have permanent jobs in public services...

Saturday, 5th November 1988

Today I went on a day trip to Kavouri beach together with my mother, my sister, Antony and some friends of the couple: Emmanuel with his wife, handsome Nick with his new girlfriend who is a gipsy (literally), and Dennis with Mary. Right from the start I could see that my mother and I didn't match well with the others. I tried to keep a positive mind and I was happy to take part in the volleyball game they fixed up after a while. However, a lot of time passed without my getting the ball and I began to wonder...

Before long I realized that Emmanuel, who was playing in the first row, always jumped up and down like a kid, especially when the ball was coming my direction, and took great care to prevent me from playing! After a while I got out of the game, rather disappointed. I don't think that anybody noticed.

I made myself comfortable on a boulder and I unconsciously started to observe the people who were

coming and going all over the beach: *Hundreds of persons are crowded in my range of vision; they are walking slowly or fast, they are shouting or lingering, they are laughing, gesticulating, beckoning, running, climbing up and down the rocks, changing directions. Each one of them is doing something different, yet they are all following a common inner tempo, sharing a common purpose; they are all secretly driven by the same invisible yet rational force which binds, controls and operates them like marionettes in a weird puppet show...*

Saturday, 28th January 1989

A few days ago uncle Harry and his wife invited us to their home in Nikaia, in order to make me a match. I don't really like the idea, yet I wouldn't like to miss a good opportunity. So, this evening I decided to pay that visit together with my father, so as to meet the would-be groom.

His name is Tim, he is 32 years old, he is a factory worker and not attractive at all: He looks like a plump vampire with pointed yellow teeth, and he struck me as wayward and smarmy. However, my father was enthusiastic about him, the two of them talked jovially together for more than an hour, and dad did his best to impress him with his sea adventures -like he always does. As about me, I did everything I could to make a negative impression to the bloke, bearing objections to anything he said. Nevertheless, he didn't seem to mind and he expressed the desire to see me again...

Wednesday, 1st February 1989

The truth is that I was not at all in the mood for meeting the vampire again, but the pressure from my parents, relatives and neighbours is incredible. Apart from

that, I feel I must make my mind up and go steady with someone, even if it is someone I don't really like. Time flies, I am not a teenager anymore, and there is no sign of true love in view. So, I clenched my teeth and agreed to go out on a date with Tim last night.

At 8:00 o' clock in the evening we met in a crowded cafeteria in Glyfada. As soon as we sat at the table, Tim put on an air of importance and said: "I'll tell you something I haven't told anybody, not even my mother: I am not a simple worker in the factory, I am a shareholder!" and after a while: "I was asked to become a manager, but I didn't accept because I would be obliged to become a fink!".

He kept trying hard to prove what a remarkable person he is, but no matter what he was saying I couldn't stifle my disgust for him. On the other side, I feel obliged to go on seeing him. I am not getting any younger and I have to get married before it is too late...

Sunday, 5th February 1989

Last night I went on another date with Tim, in the same cafeteria, although I was feeling miserable -like a sheep being led to slaughter. The bloke probably got wind of my not being crazy about him and got sulky; yet, he offered me a red rose, one of those sold by a vagabond gipsy woman.

This time he confided in me that his best friend is his mother and that if we finally got married, I would have to forget the rest of the world and socialize only with her, just like he does.

Anyway, due to lack of mutual interest, we split after an hour and a half and I didn't even remember to take the flower with me; I just left it on the table. He wished to meet me tonight too, but I said I couldn't. Finally, I agreed to see

him again on Tuesday.

When I arrived home, I was so confused and uneasy that I sat on a chair from 1:00 to 2:30 a.m., lost in my thoughts, without even changing clothes...

Tuesday, 7th February 1989

Good news at last! The publisher Halaris phoned me this morning and asked me to meet him at his office tomorrow afternoon, so as to sign a contract for the publishing of my novel "The Conspiracy of Shadows"!

I am on cloud nine, however there is a thorn in my happiness: I have promised to call that jerk of Tim and arrange to go out with him this evening.

"What do you want?" he asked coldly, as soon as he heard my voice on the phone.

"To meet you tonight," I replied.

"So, you can meet me tonight?" he said ironically, and I understood: He bears a grudge because I avoid meeting him every day -as if we had some serious love affair.

"Yes," I answered flatly.

"We had better stop here!"

"As you want!" I said spontaneously, hardly believing my ears. Free at last! Free again! My relief is beyond words; I feel as if I've just escaped a death trap...

Wednesday, 8th February 1989

Probably the most important day of my life: Right after work, at about 4:30 in the afternoon, I arrived at the offices of Halaris Publishing. The people were friendly and the atmosphere seemed positive, yet I couldn't fight a certain nervousness.

"So young and you are a writer?" asked the middle-aged manageress at a moment.

“I am not so young,” I answered in embarrassment.

The publisher showed up an hour later. He greeted me warmly, we discussed a few things about my book and we finally signed the contract, according to which my novel will be published by the end of the year.

When I left, I was overwhelmed with happiness; yet, I had no sooner reached the bus station than I was assailed by doubts: *There is no seal of the company on the contract, which makes me wonder about its validity...* However, I soon dismissed all pessimistic thoughts and I allowed myself to revel in the unprecedented sense of success...

Thursday, 9th February 1989

Without actually realizing how, Mr Zafirakis started a conversation about arts, only to conclude with an air of irony: “I believe that all those who occupy themselves with arts such as painting, music, writing and that sort of thing, are dead losses. I mean, anybody can paint a picture, or compose a song, or write a novel if they put their mind to it. But this isn't what normal people do; normal people prefer to spend their time working!”

I considered his point of view completely irrational, but I pretended to agree with him. It is not wise to object against bosses and lunatics. Anyway, that statement of Lucas sounded quite odd, especially after my un hoped-for success of yesterday...

Saturday, 11th March 1989

Life is getting better and better: It's about a couple of months now that I have been keeping company with Louise Hoidas, an old schoolmate of mine I've known ever since we were in elementary school. We meet in the bus to work every morning, we talk a lot and that's how we finally

became good friends. She is a jovial and friendly person, she displays a spirit of understanding about anything she hears. Moreover, she wins everybody's confidence with her optimism and innocence.

Louise has also introduced me not only to Nondas, her fiancé, but to her numerous friends as well, with whom we meet almost every Saturday night. For the first time in my life, I have the opportunity to go out with other young people and have lots of fun! We usually go to restaurants, cafeterias, theaters, cinemas, or disco clubs!

More often than not, Philip comes along too: He is a friend of Nondas and he is courting me all the time. I can't say he is ugly or bad, yet I'm not very fond of him -maybe because he has a long beard and he tends to overreact: He gesticulates a lot, he talks a lot, he laughs a lot, he says lots of insipid jokes.

Last night we all went to the disco "Oldies but Goodies", where they mostly play pop and rock music of the '60s and '70s. All at once, Philip pulled me by the hand and took me off to the dance floor. While we were dancing together his favourite love song, he was being rather flamboyant: He kept on making strange moves, and suddenly took my hands, raised them up and made sure we were dancing with our palms stuck together. I was very embarrassed, everybody was looking at us and I think we made a fool of ourselves. Then we danced a blues song and the bloke remarked that I wasn't mincing enough.

Later, after we had left the club and we were walking towards the taxi station, Philip approached me again and started jesting with me: "You don't know a thing about dancing and you are incapable of improving!" he remarked, smiling foolishly. I didn't get him wrong or anything, but I think he is a nuisance...

Obsession

Monday, 27th March 1989

It's two weeks now that I've been possessed by a crazy idea: I intend to find my first love, George Franzis! So, day after day I've been searching for a long lost love: Firstly, I sought to find his telephone number in old and new directories. I've tried dozens of numbers in vain, until I saw 9630..., which seemed to be more probable. I have dialed it many times, but there is no answer.

This morning, on the bus to work, I happened to meet Ivy, with whom we were classmates in the first two classes of gymnasium. We talked about our careers, I told her I work in an import company and she told me she has studied Chemistry but she works in a big bank. Then I brought up the subject of old schoolmates and George Frantzis; I was exhilarated when I heard that George has returned to Greece after completing his studies of business management in America. I even talked her into giving me his phone number, which is indeed 9630...!

... On the following days I will keep trying to find George on the phone, but nobody ever answers at the above mentioned number. I will also discover his address: He lives in a nice house near our old school. I often go there and wait patiently outside, in case George comes out. Yet, the doors and windows of the house remain stubbornly shut. I have only noticed the name of the next door neighbour, which is clearly written on the mailbox: Mrs Margaret Bogris...

Friday, 7th April 1989

It seems I have been seeing “ghosts” lately, that is persons who look like George or Rosita, his elder sister. Sometimes I even dare stalk these persons for a while! It usually takes me some time to figure out that they are just complete strangers...

This morning I met Louise on the bus to work; I thought twice before doing it, but I finally couldn't hold myself in and showed her a young man who was sitting opposite us: “Look at him, he reminds me of someone: Isn't he George Franzis, our old classmate?” I asked with an assumed air of indifference.

“No, Yvonne, this is not George, he just resembles him a little! George isn't so dark-skinned!” retorted Louise at once, and I saw that she was right.

Thursday, 13th April 1989

It was a few days ago, on the bus to work again, when I first noticed a beautiful young woman with short blond hair and piercing blue eyes. I've been thinking about it and I am almost certain it is Rosita; I intend to get acquainted with her, so as to reach her brother eventually.

This morning I went to the bus stop earlier than usual. I stood by the corner and watched her for a few minutes, while she was approaching. When the bus came, I took care to sit opposite her, so that I could observe her facial features more carefully. After a while it was clear to me that it was not Rosita, although she looks like her a lot. Then, all of a sudden, the young woman turned and looked at me in terror -obviously she had just realized I had been watching her. Poor girl, I must have frightened her out of her wits!

As for the rest: It is two months now that Alice has opened a haberdasher's, although she is pregnant. This

means that my parents and I are always on the alert to run and help her, not only with the household chores but with the shop as well. As about Antony, he doesn't even deign to come and have a look. Therefore, Alice asked my father to leave his morning job as a paint-store assistant and undertake her haberdasher's -without any payment, of course. In the end, my father quit his job a few days ago, so as to satisfy the needs of her Majesty the Queen Alice. However, this evening my sister announced that she won't "hire" dad, on the grounds that "he will interfere in my affairs too much," as she said.

Saturday, 22nd April 1989

A bolt from the blue: My sister and Antony have just separated (once again) after lots of quarrels, fights, beatings and other happy incidents. We are all overwhelmed by her tragedy, while she is in urgent need of moral and -mostly-financial aid, especially now that she is pregnant. As a result, from now on my parents and I will have to career about all day so as to satisfy Alice's increasing needs, taking into account that she has just rented a small apartment on her own.

Anyway, I have the impression that her independence won't last long -as usual: The game "Separation - Tragedy - Reconciliation" takes place about twice a year, which means that she moves house twice a year. The general plot is as follows: Without even a clear reason, the couple make feathers fly, Antony beats up my sister, she goes away and rents a house on her own. Then, the repentant husband goes and finds her, he cajoles her with sweet talk and flowers, Alice returns home, she abandons the house she had found for herself, and so on, until next time.

In any case, the duchess demands that we promptly run and help her with the enormous amount of work needed to be done every time she moves house. Needless to say, everybody (relatives, friends, neighbours) is constantly busy with Alice's problems. "But you have another child too," said cousin Dimitri to my father the other day, and only then did I realize the truth: One way or another, Alice has been absorbing all my parents' energy for decades now...

Saturday, 20th May 1989

Constantine, the nouveau riche husband of cousin Niki, has been thinking no end of himself lately: He used to be an employee in aluminum works, but now he has his own industry, as well as a night club on the road along the seaside -and all this within a year!

The fact is that Antony, who has already made up with Alice, desires to join the "elite" too. For this reason, he and my sister have been invited to dinner by Constantine tonight, so as to meet some of his estimable collaborators. Alice put on the sexiest outfit she could find (tight shorts with a flashy bust) and escorted her husband to the business meeting, all airs and graces.

Conclusion: It's a good thing that Antony won't finally agree to take part in all this. Before long we shall be informed that Constantine and his "collaborators" are involved in drug dealing! Yet, because of some mistake of his, Constantine will finally be betrayed by the "racket" and end up in prison! *And then I wonder why my family has always been poor, while certain people become rich and successful in no time...*

Monday, 22nd May 1989

As soon as I came back from work, Alice brought

little Yanni for us to babysit till late at night -as usual. Despite that, she never misses an opportunity to show her contempt for me:

“Isn't there a nice guy to introduce to Yvonne? Antony has so many friends!” suggested mum at a moment.

“Antony's friends see Yvonne almost every day! If they liked her, they would have said something,” answered my sister disdainfully. “Besides, I don't like their telling me that they don't fancy Yvonne!”

“How can you be sure they don't fancy her?” wondered mum.

“But can't you see how awful she looks?”

“This is what I look like, take it or leave it!” I popped in.

“Everybody leaves it!” wound up Alice, with an air of one hundred Hollywood stars.

Wednesday, 14th June 1989

Good news at last: The publishing of my book has already started! A few days ago I was given the corrected rolls and this afternoon I returned them with a few more corrections. I also gave them a cover, which is a water-colour painting made by me: It depicts a mysterious landscape with pyramids and the red-haired protagonist in the foreground. As far as the manageress told me, they can process it on the computer so that it will appear as a real work of art. I can say I have enjoyed the whole procedure, yet I wonder: Isn't it the publisher's job to find covers for the books he publishes?

Monday, 3rd July 1989

Before the break of dawn, after a very painful delivery since the umbilical cord was coiled around the baby, my sister gave birth to her second son today. The boy will take

the name of our father, that is Josef.

The most remarkable event: When the baby was brought to her in the morning, Alice was most surprised to find out that he had changed sex! “You know, my child is a boy,” she informed the nurse, who finally fetched my sister's baby boy, while the girl was returned to her mother.

As an expected consequence, Alice will have to close her shop shortly, although it makes enough money. Anyway, now with the baby, my mother and I will have a lot more work to do...

Sunday, 16th July 1989

My incredible love story goes on: A few days ago the telephone number 9630... answered at last! Yet, all I could hear was two infants' voices that didn't make any sense. I asked to talk to George Franzis, they told me to “hold on a minute”, I waited for almost half an hour, but there was no one there to speak with me! During this week I tried three more times, but the result was the same.

Still refusing to face reality, this afternoon I finally decided to talk to Louise about this matter and ask her to help me by using her numerous acquaintances from high school. To my great relief, she agreed happily: “I can understand, Yvonne; till recently I was also in love with another classmate of ours, Gerry, if you remember! Don't worry, I'll be happy to help you find George!”

However, when Louise dialed the above mentioned number, the same two infants answered the phone; when she asked for George, they shouted at her in unison: “I am George Franzis!”

Saturday, 22nd July 1989

Yet, the more fate opposes me, the more stubborn I

get: Suspecting that George might have changed phone numbers after so many years, this morning I searched and found Mrs Bogris' telephone number in the yellow pages.

As soon as she answered the phone, I assumed an air of innocence and asked to speak to Mr George Franzis. The woman explained to me politely that he lives right next door and that I have the wrong number. However, she refused to give me the correct one...

Friday, 11th August 1989

The summer is almost gone and the boss is playing possum: It is already crystal clear to me that Lucas has no intention of giving me the summer leave I am entitled to, although this is the only month of the year that we hardly have any work to do in the office.

This morning, I dropped a hint about this subject once again, but he kept harping on the same string: "I won't be able to give you a leave next week, because I must go to the village; neither the week after the next, because my wife wants me to go to the village with her, and someone must stay in the office," he said with an air of irony.

"Next week I won't be able to come to the office, because I have already bought the tickets for my vacations!" I lied to him.

For a few moments Zafirakis was flabbergasted, as if he couldn't believe his ears. Then, he started shouting, wild with anger: "What are you talking about, Yvonne? This is impossible! Up to now you have given me a different impression, I thought you were somebody I could rely on! But now I see another Yvonne before me!"

"I can't understand why you wonder," I replied as calm as possible. "I think this is the best for both of us, since August is the only month that all Italian companies close for

summer vacations, so we have no work at all. Yet, you keep on postponing my leave with various excuses...”

“We are going to have lots of work this month! This means that I will have to hire another secretary for the time you will be away! I will be financially ruined because of you!” he retorted, all nerves.

“Certain people should be thanking God for having a job! Instead, they want to go on vacations!” popped up Mrs Stasa.

Suddenly, I was about to burst into tears, although I knew those two were talking nonsense. Anyway, I didn't expect such a negative reaction and I didn't want to be on bad terms with the boss; therefore, I considered it good to beat a strategic retreat:

“I didn't know there will be so much work to do, especially this month; in this case, I will give back the tickets and I won't go on holidays,” I said with a trembling voice.

“Oh, no, you will go on your precious holidays now! Nevertheless, you should know that normally it is the boss who decides when the employee goes on vacations! Moreover, don't forget that most bosses don't content themselves with clerical work from their secretaries! They demand more things!”

Certainly, that was the last thing I ever expected to hear from the always prim and proper Mr Zafirakis. I just stayed there numb, looking at him with confused, tearful eyes.

“Yes, Yvonne, this is the case: Apart from answering the phone and typing invoices, secretaries have to offer other, more special services to their bosses! Do you think that everybody is as easily contented as I am?” wound up Lucas, with a sly look in his eyes.

After that blasting, I asked permission to go out for a while. I spent the next twenty minutes walking around with

tears in my eyes...

Wednesday, 16th August 1989

This morning Lucas brought another girl to the office, obviously an acquaintance of his, who will sub for me from the 21st to the 31st of August that I will be absent. Her name is Maria, and she is a twenty-year-old super ambitious crank who thinks she is an executive of great caliber:

“Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't stay here for an hour!” she boasted off with an air of arrogance, as soon as we were left alone. “Till recently I used to work in a big company, where work was extremely demanding: You couldn't linger for one moment and there was always something new to learn! As far as I can see, nothing special ever happens here, and I am not a loser, I intend to succeed in my life!”

Monday, 21st – Friday, 25th August 1989

Holidays in Perdika, on the island of Aegina, together with my parents: We are staying in a traditional hotel, which is not at all bad. Yet, I have a problem because all three of us are staying in a small room: Dad snores all night long, he sounds like a locomotive and I can hardly get any sleep at night. At least, we have found some company: We've met a family of neighbours who happen to have their cottage here, so we aren't bored. Every morning we go swimming to nearby beaches; in the evenings we gather in their veranda or we walk around the village.

I would have a much nicer time if I weren't obsessed with work: I feel miserable all the time and I can never calm down, day or night. I keep bringing to mind the incredible situations I usually face in the office, the permanent hostility of the working environment and the endless demands of the

boss: He wants me to work continuously, without ever taking a leave, always with the basic salary, while he will be assigning more and more tasks to me. I also keep thinking about the reprisals I'm going to face when I return to the office in September...

However, in the last morning of my vacations, a revolutionary idea suddenly occurs to me: Leave Vinomec for good and open my own office of typings and translations in the centre of Athens. I feel much better already...

... When I return to the office on the 1st of September, Maria will inform me the following: During the days of my absence, there was no work at all at the office, there was nothing for her to do, she was bored to death and the office reminded of a cemetery -which was absolutely normal for August. In a few words, Lucas went to the trouble of hiring another secretary for fifteen days only, just because he wanted to show me how irresponsible it was of me to ask for a leave in the super busy month of August...

Monday, 18th September 1989

Louise has tried many times to organize a gathering of old classmates (including George Franzis), but up to now it has been impossible for her to find any of them on the phone, she says. The fact is that as time goes by and I don't get any closer to my goal, I get more and more frustrated.

After months of vain search for a lost love, this morning I felt so disappointed that I didn't hesitate to do something crazy: I took a "sick leave" from work and went to the high school of Glyfada in order to ask for Rosita's address and phone number!

"I am looking for an old friend of mine, Rosita Franzis, whom I lost years ago but I must find again!" I said to the astonished masters, who showed unexpected understanding

and started searching in the old lists of pupils right away. A little later, they were sorry to inform me that there is no record of that pupil after so many years.

Then, as if I were an automaton, I bent my steps to the Town Hall, where a similar scene was repeated...

Wednesday, 20th September 1989

I am on holidays and I am luxuriating in the sunshine, the golden beach, the clear water of the sea. The bright sun rays are sparkling on the azure, lacy sea waves. The landscape is magical.

George Franzis is with me; he is sweet, charming, tall and slender, with shiny brown eyes -just like then, when we were both in the second class of gymnasium. He is perfect and he is mine. We are in love and very happy together. We kiss gently, and I know this is a sign of our meeting again.

Right at that moment I wake up with a unique sense of bliss in my heart. *What a wonderful dream that was...*

Thursday, 21st September 1989

An unexpected solution to my problem was given this morning by Theone, a neighbour and good friend of ours, a poor woman who works as a domestic help. While we were chatting, it was casually revealed that she often goes to Mrs Bogris' house and does the housework! What a paranoiac coincidence!

Without hesitation, I seized the opportunity and asked her to fish information about George Franzis. "Why, didn't you finish your affairs when you were in gymnasium?" she wondered and laughed exuberantly, while I was in seventh heaven.

Monday, 25th September 1989

“George is studying business management in America. He is engaged to a Greek woman and he will marry her soon. He will never return to Greece again.”

That was the news Theoni brought me this evening.

So, this is the end. I can see now that all this was nothing but a wild goose chase. Yet, I wonder: Why was I possessed by such paranoia, twelve years after losing George? Maybe because deep inside I know that during my whole life there will be no other love for me. I know that my life will go on in absolute loneliness, following its own weird path...

Life goes on...

Friday, 29th September 1989

It was a very important day for me today: With an air of determination, I took a deep breath and announced Lucas my intention of leaving his company at the end of next month “for personal reasons”, which I strongly refused to reveal no matter how much the boss whined.

... During the whole month of October, numerous girls will appear at the office, applying for my position. Needless to say, it will prove to be impossible for Lucas to find a secretary who is as cheap as I am, or efficient enough to do well in his special test in foreign languages. “Such difficult tests are not given anywhere, not even in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs!” said a candidate who had studied in Italy.

Finally, Zafirakis will hire a sedate girl who has studied psychology in Italy and demands nothing more than the basic salary...

Saturday, 2nd December 1989

It's been a month now since I opened my own office of typings and translations, after I had found a cheap place to rent near Omonia Square. For the time being I don't have many clients but my fixed costs are very low, so I am not particularly worried. Anyway, I like this job a lot better than working in a company. In fact, I think that being an employee has never been my cup of tea...

As about my friendship with Louise, I can see it is not unclouded any more: Little by little she is alienating herself from me; we hardly go out together, or even meet anymore.

This is probably due to the fact that she prefers to see Nondas, her boyfriend, more frequently. We occasionally go out together, the three of us; I don't really like this, it seems to me that I play gooseberry.

Nevertheless, every now and then she promises to introduce me to this or that handsome friend of hers, which actually never happens. Besides, whenever I confide in her that I like someone from her party, she says that he is a dead loss and takes care that we never get in touch with that person again.

About a month ago I told Louise that I like Takis: He is a tall, slender guy with blond hair and blue eyes, a serious and sensible person who happens to be a friend of her fat, disagreeable brother. We haven't met Takis or the others ever since. In fact, I haven't seen the guy more than three times in all. On the other hand, Louise insists on my going steady with Harry, a plump silly boy who is the laughing stock of the whole party. "The more I look at you both, I more I see you are a matching couple!" she told me, in an equivocal manner, the other day.

This evening I called her once again and asked her to arrange an outing with the other guys as well, but she refused at once: "Unfortunately I can't, I have no time for that. Besides, I don't see the others anymore, and they have been complaining: "You neglect us because you have other friends now", they say!" she excused herself, meaning that she prefers me to them. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course...

Monday, 18th December 1989

After a lot of wavering, I decided to take the initiative and communicate with Halaris by phone, since I haven't had any news from him for months now -that is ever since I gave

the corrected rolls back.

I arranged to meet the publisher this afternoon, at a certain address he gave me. When I got there, I was surprised to see that their new head offices are in a luxurious eight-storeyed edifice not far from Sintagma Square. *This must be a really thriving business! Yet, their books are not so renowned*, I wondered at first but dismissed all negatives thoughts immediately, reckoning that the rapid development of Halaris Publishing could mean something positive for me as well. Besides, the change of address could also justify the delay in the publishing of my book. Finally, we signed an extension of time until the end of 1990.

Conclusion: Halaris will never come in contact with me again and “The Conspiracy of Shadows” will never be published. A lot later I will realize that the whole thing was part of the publisher's scheme to show a great number of books under publishing, so as to get a subsidy from the European Union. Nevertheless, two years later Halaris Publishing will go bankrupt and close for good.

Tuesday, 16th January 1990

Business has been looking up lately. Week after week I earn more and more money, which makes me feel satisfied. My most important client is the famous publishing house “Pangaea”, which publishes books of science and literature. They have given me a bulky “Lexicon of Scientific Terms” to type, which is a quite interesting book.

Taking into account that my income has increased, I have also decided to take out a life-assurance policy, although I have social security insurance too. This morning I contacted an agent of “EasyLife” and signed an insurance policy which offers extra medicare plus a retirement program. The latter will last 25 years and it will provide me

with a good pension. Till then, I will have to pay 8000 drachmas per month as premium.

My little sister hastened to take out a similar policy as well, at my parents' expense of course, since they always indulge all her fancies. I have the impression that Alice is always seeking to copy me in every possible way, dreaming of being ahead of me some day...

Sunday, 20th January 1990

Last night I decided to go to the usual place in Glyfada and meet my supposed friends, although Louise didn't come along. I was given a cool welcome and they hardly spoke to me. Takis was absent. We finally went to a nice seaside tavern in Vouliagmeni, ten persons in all, and we sat at a big table.

Michael, Louise's brother, was there too, and he happened to be sitting on my left. All at once he laughed ironically and moved his chair away from mine and from the table, in a most ostentatious manner, making all those sitting on his left do likewise. In this way, the "gentleman" declared his abhorrence in me -non verbally yet clearly. As a result, all those hours we stayed in that taverna, there was a huge empty space on my left at the table, which looked very, very odd...

Wednesday, 21st February 1990

Time seems to be passing faster and faster, yet my life is always characterized by deathly immobility. That's why three months ago I decided to go to a match-making office in Athens. I have already met some would-be grooms, all of them ugly and disagreeable: One of them was 38 years old, divorced, fat and wayward; he wanted to split fifteen minutes after we had met in a cafeteria. He hardly waited for

five more minutes, for me to eat up my ice cream. Another one had a squint and he was wearing huge glasses on his pock-marked face; moreover, he lisped badly. Two others, colourless factory workers with no hair on their heads, made a wry face as soon as they saw me and wanted to split at once. Another one had only two fingers in his right hand and his mouse-like face didn't attract me at all; when we parted, he took care to shake my hand with his crippled one. Another one was comparatively good-looking, yet he put me off with his arrogance and his tendency to boast off continuously.

The short, hairless kiosk owner with the shrieking voice, whom I saw yesterday, was in a hurry to disappear fifteen minutes after we had met, because he had work to do, as he said. This afternoon, when I phoned the match-making office, I was informed that the bloke had complained about my clothes. The match maker advised me politely to avoid dresses and prefer “something more fashionable” (that is something more tarty) when I meet the princes. On the other hand, “I hope you aren't interested in the man's appearance,” she says again and again.

I think I had better quit these silly meetings. I am certainly not in the mood for losing my time with all kinds of screwy persons. Anyway, I suspect that marriage with an ugly, problem guy is not at all what I really want from my life...

Monday, 26th February 1990

Right from the first months of his life, little Josef has proved to be a very wayward baby, all nerves and whining. He was only five months old when he uttered he first word: It was neither “mum”, nor “dad”; it was “bad”: His father was rocking him playfully in his lap, asking him “What kind

of boy are you?” when the baby started giggling “bad-bad-bad!”. When he doesn't want to eat, he looks away and grits his few teeth in exasperation. If he doesn't like something, that is often, he clenches his fists and shakes all over. When he sees anybody, he extends one or both his hands threateningly and shouts: “Da-da! Da-da!”. He is also extremely naughty: This morning he managed to climb up the net walls of his playpen and jump out of it!

... From now on we must be always on the alert and never lose sight of Josef, lest he should climb on the television, or break a window pane, or upset the sitting-room table, or destroy the rolling shutters with his tiny hands -events which are meant to happen during the months to follow...

Tuesday, 27th February 1990

On the contrary, Yanni is growing into a very sweet child. Since his mother works, this is his second year in the kindergarten.

“Tell us Yanni, are there any beautiful girls in your class?” aunt Penelope asked him this afternoon.

“No, there aren't. I don't like girls!” he answered solemnly.

“You don't like girls?” I wondered.

“No! I like women!”

“He will get into trouble very soon!” concluded aunt, with her usual enigmatic smile.

Wednesday, 28th February 1990

In the meantime, my friendship with Louise has been going downhill. He haven't met for over a month now. I have called her many times but it is always Michael who answers the phone, telling me that his sister is absent. I don't even see her in the bus anymore; she probably takes another

one, so as not to meet me.

This morning I happened to see her at the bus station, after a long time. However, she avoided to sit next to me; she made herself comfortable in another seat, opposite me. As soon as we reached the bus terminus in Athens, she stood up hastily, she said goodbye coldly and got away at once, as if we were strangers.

I suppose this is the end of our friendship and the only thing I can do about it, is wonder: If such a close friendship, with someone I've known since we were six, didn't work out, then what can I expect from other relationships in the future? In general, what can I expect from the future?

What future?

*All I can see before me is darkness,
circles that close one after the other,
days that tumble down one upon the other,
as in vain I'm trying to ignore that
the days of hope belong to the past...*